Affective Vision:

Urban Landscape Photographs and their Paratexts

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D.Phil. in Fine Art

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This practice-based research project focuses on how artists use paratexts to communicate extravisual phenomena such as affect and emotion in photographs of the urban landscape. I construe these environments as 'repositories' of personal experiences and sociopolitical histories that only become fully apparent to the viewer through texts such as titles, captions, and artist statements.

In the first three chapters, I discuss a range of photographic practitioners, describing some critical differences between photographs that share the built environment as their subject. Then, in more extended case studies, I examine the tensions that arise when artists use paratexts to elicit affective readings of their works since this external information links the images with their biography and intentions.

In the closing sections, I offer some observations on the two photobooks that constitute the practice component of my degree. The first, *Border Documents*, brings together short narratives of my father's youth in Ciudad Juárez, with recent photographs of the places where those events unfolded, in an attempt to avoid the graphic violence shown in most depictions of the city. The second, *A Certain Logic of Expectations,* is a psychogeographical exploration of Oxford that seeks to capture the current cultural moment of Brexit. These works share a view of everyday life as a complex matrix of interconnected events that can reveal some of the social, historical, and political idiosyncrasies of the urban environment through the combination of images and texts. As such, they can be seen as counter-narratives to the cities they depict, contesting their hegemonic reputation and foregrounding what is at stake when images reinforce cultural cliches. The conclusion reached through the different strands of this research project is that the visual indeterminacy of photography can be preserved despite the involvement of language, as long as the works avoid semantic redundancy.

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Cristela Gutiérrez and Arturo Soto García, whose love has been the foundation of my life. I am equally grateful for the love and assistance of my brother, Erasmo Soto, and of my girlfriend, Ayda Gragossian.

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I. Introduction: The Contested Autonomy of Photographs

We cannot expect photographs to communicate ideas with the same clarity as words, for they do not constitute a universal language.[1] What photographs withhold can be as important as what they depict, making contextual information vital to their understanding. The literary critic Roland Barthes defined them as "messages without a code," which fittingly describes how photographs are more ambiguous than written formulations.[2] Paratexts can facilitate a picture's intelligibility while also communicating extravisual information that opens up the possibility for affective readings. Leaving these external textual elements unconsidered can curtail the expressiveness of an image, because we might not access all the information it contains. The specific area of inquiry for this practice-led research project is the effects of certain paratexts on art photographs of the urban landscape.[3]

Photographs do not depend on external aides to transform appearances into imaginative prospects full of interpretive possibilities, but when used in conjunction with words, they can create complex narratives that facilitate the communication of emotions. While resolved combinations of text and image can be very useful when striving towards objectivity, I will concentrate on those that activate the potential permeability of both mediums, what Jacques Rancière has termed photography's

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[1] For a seminal text that elucidates why photography is not a universal language, see Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan, 1982).

[2] Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 17.

[3] By art photographs I mean those made with the intention of being art. I will not be discussing images that have been recontextualized or appropriated, for which the act of resignification becomes their primary artistic gesture. All the photographs I write about happen to be analogue, and while this technological aspect is not central to my thesis, I acknowledge that the debates surrounding the ethics and aesthetics of digital imagery are a pressing concern in contemporary art discourse and practice. Nevertheless, my discussion of photography relates to content rather than to an ontology of the medium. For a discussion on the mobility of digital images, see Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *E-flux Journal*, no. 10 (November 2009): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/

"pensive condition," in which the visual resists being subsumed by the textual to establish instead an "indeterminate expressive logic."[4]

Through case studies and my own works, I hope to show that an intermedial tension between texts and photographs can be productive, but only if one medium does not dominate the other.[5] I begin by introducing some of the key terms that frame this discussion - paratext, affect, urban landscape - and relate them to specific written and visual examples. I then develop more sustained case studies on the work of Jitka Hanzlová, Zoe Leonard and Madoka Takagi. This is followed by a discussion of the two photobooks that make up the practice component of my thesis. First, I establish the commonalities between them; then I present the motivations behind each project separately to give a sense of their underlying set of ideas.

This modest thesis can be seen as an attempt to establish a critical dialogue with some of the artists and writers who have influenced my practice and shaped my understanding of the photographic medium. I have strived to comprehend their work better, while learning in the process how to articulate my feelings and beliefs towards the artistic and theoretical positions they represent. The main reason I wanted to do this degree was to rethink my visual practice in relation to words, so a few words might be necessary to explain how I approached the relation between practice and research. The method I followed is one in which the art practice drives the research, embracing the open-ended structure of the program at my faculty, the Ruskin School of Art, which allowed me sufficient freedom to trust the direction of my own interests, instead of

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[4] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 114-15/122. John Berger cautioned that closed image text relations could turn into "dogmatic assertions," which is the opposite of what I want to create. John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (London: Writers and Readers, 1982), 91.

[5] For a useful essay on the applicability of the term "intermediality" to photography, see Lars Elleström, "Photography and intermediality: Analytical perspectives on notions referred to by the term "photography," *Semiotica* 197 (October 2013): 153–169.

rigidly following preestablished academic protocols.[6] Intuition, then, played an important role in my academic journey, letting me experiment with the direction and shape my research would take. While there are many pitfalls to this method, one of its rewards lies in the pleasure of slowly finding your own way.[7] Research in other fields of the humanities can occasionally consist of engaging with a number of canonical texts and producing a commentary on them. There is no such academic corpus for a practice-led research degree in the arts. The challenge consists of being open to the influence of sources from a variety of fields of study, while funneling those stimuli towards a coherent outcome.

I want to stress that I worked concurrently on the practice and research components throughout my time here, informed by the belief that the two need to enrich each other. This approach, however, makes the exact place and quantity of theory on a practice-led research degree harder to determine. Unless a theoretical position fittingly explains a practice, or the artist is trying to illustrate a theory through art, I see theory as something we are invited to react against: that is, testing theory *through* the production of art. Theory can suggest new pathways, but it can also confuse the researcher and stifle their practice. What will hopefully come through after engaging with the photobooks and this text, is that there is a coherent internal logic to the research that is embedded in the practice itself. I wanted to produce works that were not merely "formal devices" that could be reduced to their "sign value," but created a dynamic and stimulating dialectic with this written component.[8]

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[6] The question of whether art produces knowledge is contentious, as it involves epistemological issues but also political aspects that relate to institutions and their public funding. See James Elkins, *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C: New Academia Publishing, 2009).

[7] On the relation between artistic research and failure, see Bruce Barber "The Question (of Failure) in Art Research" in *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD, and the Academy*, ed. Brad Buckley and John Conomos (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2009).

[8] Tom Holert, *Knowledge Besides Itself: Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020), 59.

II. Urban Landscape Photographs, Paratexts and Affect

The literary theorist Gérard Genette coined the term 'paratext' to describe those elements that frame and influence our perception of a text. These can range from the title of a novel to the blurbs on the back cover of a book.[9] Genette divides paratexts into peritexts and epitexts: the former are contained within the physical confines of the book, while the latter are external to it, such as advertisements and press releases.[10] He argues that every text is associated with a number of paratexts that create friction with the main body of work.[11] The term has proven valuable beyond its original application to books, though according to a critic, Genette's theory has had to be sorted out gradually across other fields, tweaking it to fit the characteristics of the media in question.[12]

Since photographs do not exist in a vacuum, the concept of paratexts is a helpful tool to analyze those elements that lie outside of the picture plane, but that constitute a vital component for the interpretation, consumption, and circulation of photographs. Titles and captions, as well as more peripheral texts like artist statements and interviews influence the expectations of the viewers by shaping the "first contours" of the images.[13] In other cases, paratexts shed light on the intentionality of the artists and their creative processes, features that some images occlude or cannot communicate on their own.

The paratext has not been extensively theorized in relation to the photographic medium, and has therefore seldom been applied to the study of specific photographs.

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[9] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[10] Ibid., 5.
[11] There are rare instances of paratexts without texts, for instance, works that have been lost and all that remains is the title. Ibid., 3-4.
[12] Georg Stanitzek, "Texts and Paratexts in Media," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 1 (2005), 35-6.
[13] Stanitzek, "Texts and Paratexts in Media," 32.

For instance, in *The Spoken Image*, Clive Scott provides an extensive introduction in which he explains the key differences between visual and written semiotics, while the bulk of the book considers a multitude of contexts where words and images intersect – including fashion, reportage and fine art photography – without making reference to Genette's term.[14] The concept is also omitted in the edited volume *Phototextualities*, which offers an otherwise valuable range of essays on the intersection between texts and images.[15] Given that both books are heavily influenced by structuralist and post-structuralist theory that posits images to be read and dissected as 'texts,' it is particularly striking that Genette's literary term did not provide a fertile ground for discussion.

More recently, the historian Caroline Blinder has used the term 'photo-text' to describe "a book designed and structured as a project in which writing and photographs are of equal importance," that is, where the intermedial interaction is "intrinsic to the aim and methods of the project at hand."[16] While 'photo-text' is a useful umbrella term to describe the characteristics of such a project, it does not clarify how texts of different kinds exert an influence on images. The value of Genette's concept is that it can be used to break down the influence of individual textual elements on the photographs, discussing anything from a tricky one-word title to the value of a befitting epigraph on a photobook. Paratexts, to put it differently, illuminate how these interactions play out.

Because the relationship between photographs – be it a sequence or a single picture – and the textual elements mentioned above is often vague, the question of what constitutes a 'photographic text,' where those limits lie, and what demarcates them, can be difficult to determine. Probing the parameters of paratexts accompanies

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[14] Clive Scott, *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language* (London: Reaktion, 1999).
[15] Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble, eds., *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).
[16] Caroline Blinder, "The Photo-Text in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, (2017): doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.65/.

their very existence, and there is now a substantial production of literary and aesthetic studies that have been dedicated to pursuing this end, particularly in relation to conceptions of authorship.[17] A well-known example of the importance of a title – and whether it should be considered as part of the work – is presented by the philosopher Arthur Danto, who uses Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1560) to illustrate how "the work will have a different structure"once you know that the legs in the sea belong to the mythical character.[18] "A title is more than a name or a label," asserts Danto, "it is a *direction* for interpretation."[19] This knowledge, which is external to the visual object, influences how we "put the painting together in a way impossible if we lacked that information."[20] Viewers will respond differently once they have been exposed to this information, collaborating with the author in completing the work, and "infusing" it with additional connotations.[21]

In photography, too, there is little consensus as to when a text is a peripheral element or a constitutive part of a work. As with other media, the relationship between photographic images and their paratexts is not fixed but varies depending on how the image is printed, exhibited, and disseminated.[22] Nor is there consensus on what the function of a paratext should be. While some texts explain the visual content of the image, others suggest more abstract notions that the photograph does not – or cannot – convey. In a fine art context, this decision frequently hinges on the role or weight that an artist decides to assign to a text.

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[17] See Florian Sedlmeier, "The Paratext and Literary Narration: Authorship, Institutions, Historiographies," *Narrative* 26, no. 1 (2018): 63-80.
[18] Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 116.
[19] Ibid., 119. Emphasis in original.
[20] Ibid., 117.
[21] Ibid., 172.
[22] See Mia Consalvo, "When Paratexts Become Texts: De-centering the Game-as-text." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, no. 2 (2017): 177-183.

I hold the view that a textual element is a paratext if it exists outside the picture plane or is located in such a way that it can be separated from the image. From this it follows that captions, titles, statements and other related elements are paratexts. The same applies to photographs in books, as the images in the volume can change their disposition in physical or virtual exhibitions, websites and social networks. An immediate challenge to this view is to be found in the work of artists like Duane Michals, Karen Knorr, and Chris Verene, amongst many others, whose prints have typed or handwritten text next to the image [fig. 1]. I contend that, even in these cases, the photographs can be unhinged from their texts.

Such an instance is found in Chris Verene's book *Family* (2010), whose cover image – entitled *The Same Day They Signed the Divorce Papers a Tornado Hit the House* – was later licensed for the cover of the album *Sixth House* (2018) by The Rock*A*Teens[23]. The band cleverly mimicked Verene's handwriting but substituted it with their name and the title of the album [fig. 2]. However, in a work such as Willie Doherty's *The Walls* (1987), a panoramic landscape that alludes to the recent political history of Northern Ireland, the text could not be considered a paratext, as it is permanently inscribed on the image itself.[24] This means that wherever the image goes, the text follows, even if the display context changes [fig. 3]. Another instance that complicates my position are certain textual works by conceptual artists where the photograph could be considered to be a paratext to the writing. These are fascinating examples, but an exhaustive discussion of paratextual theory as applied to photography exceeds the scope of this thesis.[25]

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[23] Verene was a drummer in the band from its beginning in 1994 until 1997.
[24] For an extended analysis of Doherty's photographic work, including this particular image, see Jean Fisher, *Vampire in the Text: Narratives of Contemporary Art* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003), 92-105.
[25] In Victor Burgin's *VI* (1973), the main element is the text, which is accompanied by a photograph that is meant to function ambiguously as evidence. In this work, Burgin provides a conceptual framework in which the photograph is the subordinate element. See Victor Burgin, *Work and Commentary* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1973).

Photographs that rely on paratexts do so to extend their powers of connotation. I will focus on cases where photographs depend on paratexts to communicate extravisual aspects that bridge the divide between our intellectual and emotional responses. These kinds of paratexts give us access to an affective dimension that changes how the content of an image is perceived, underscoring the role of the viewer in the interpretation and production of meaning. In this sense, presentation and context are key to establish a viewing dynamic through which both the image and the text can fulfill the desired function. Works that combine photography and text can take many forms and involve unusual techniques and materials.[26] I will be mostly discussing documentary photographs of the urban landscape.

There has been a constant resistance in some quarters to the use of texts to communicate emotions in conjunction with photographs. The critic Jerry L. Thompson believes that words interfere with the possibility of suggesting feelings visually: "In the world of pictures, talk has its uses, but words are not the way to the heart of the deepest mysteries."[27] According to Thompson, the advantage of photographs is that they seek "a direct connection, a connection unmediated, or mediated by feeling rather than verbal understanding."[28] In his view, images need to keep close to our unconscious drives to remain ambiguous and exciting. Thompson's position is representative of those artists and critics who are apprehensive about losing the interpretive indeterminacy of the visual, dreading that photographs will turn into simple affirmative sentences that state the obvious.

[26] For an overview of different practices that combine text and photography, see Andreas Hapkemeyer and Peter Weiermair, *Photo Text Text Photo: The Synthesis of Photography and Text in Contemporary Art* (Zürich: Edition Stemmle, 1996).
[27] Jerry L. Thompson, *Truth and Photography: Notes on Looking and Photographing* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 65.
[28] Ibid., 55.

Conversely, the literary critic Jonathan Kamholtz believes that the connective strands between text and image can "maintain their independence," resulting in "a captioned vision."[29] Words provide "a desire for closure apparently denied us by unlabeled images."[30] I experienced such a frustrating search for closure with Joel Sternfeld's *On This Site* (1998), a work I first encountered in my undergraduate degree. The photobook shows places where violent events occurred but left little or no trace in the landscape. The facts of these events are communicated to the viewer via impartial captions similar to those used in photojournalism. Since each scene was chosen in relation to a past event, not every photograph in the series delivers the heightened sense of visual pleasure characteristic of Sternfeld's previous book *American Prospects* (1987).[31] While the compositional style and technique of these two bodies of work are consistent, one has to read the captions of *On This Site* to understand the pictures' significance, which only intensified my lack of response to the latter series.

At the time I found an image such as *82-70 Austin Street, Kew Gardens, Queens, New York, November* (1995) insufficiently 'aesthetic,' as it lacked his signature play of colors and lines that turned composition into a semantic value [fig. 4]. It took me some time to realize that while the photograph had failed to make much of an impression, the information contained in the caption had stuck in my head:

> Kitty Genovese was repeatedly stabbed outside her apartment in the early morning hours of March 13, 1964. Thirty-eight people heard her cries for help. Although the attack lasted over half an hour, not a single person called the police until after she had died.[32]

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[29] Jonathan Kamholtz, "Literature and Photography: The Captioned Vision vs. The Firm, Mechanical Impression," *The Centennial Review* 24, no. 4 (1980): 386.
[30] Ibid., 388.
[31] *American Prospects* is not entirely devoid of text. The book discloses where and when each picture was made. I was not aware at that time that significant observations could be made from just this information.
[32] Joel Sternfeld, *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012), unpaginated. Genovese's story briefly captured the nation's attention as it represented an extreme case of 'bystander apathy' that some see as typical of big cities. A recent documentary film challenges this perception. See *The Witness*, directed by James D. Solomon (2015; USA: FilmRise, 2016), DVD.

It is only through the aid of words that we can access this tragic information, but once we have been exposed to the emotional impact of those facts, it is difficult to remain unaffected by them, even if the visual representation of that unremarkable street in Queens remains the same. More than any other work, Sternfeld's *On This Site* made me aware of the possibilities of urban landscape photographs to communicate emotions and prompted me to enquire further into the interplay of words and images.[33]

On This Site also exemplifies why the captions in a photobook should be considered as paratexts, even when they seem inextricable from the images because they share a fixed physical space. The division between them becomes more marked as soon as they are transposed into a different mode of display. Indeed, Sternfeld has declared that "you can't convince some museums that the text is part of the art," which betrays a longstanding disinclination by some curators towards words in relation to fine art photographs.[34] In the case of *On This Site*, such a dismissal carries unfortunate consequences, as the temporal disconnect between the historical events and their visual representation hinges on the viewers' awareness of the captions. As the philosopher Peter Lamarque argues in his study of the ontology of artworks, these particular kinds of objects "are subject to normative conditions of perception. Both the context of viewing and appropriate background knowledge contribute to the experience demanded by, and realizable in, a work when perceived correctly."[35]

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[33] Sternfeld describes having a similar realization: "It occurred to me that I held something within: a list of places that I cannot forget because of the tragedies that occurred at these sites… Yet there was something else that drew me to this work. I think of it as the question of knowability. Experience has taught me again and again that you can never know what lies beneath a surface or behind a façade. Our sense of place, our understanding of photographs of the landscape is inevitably limited and fraught with misreading." Sternfeld, *On This Site*, unpaginated. Sternfeld has continued to produce work about the emotions elicited by urban and natural landscapes. See his collaboration with Frank Gohlke *Landscape as Longing: Queens, New York* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2016).

[34] "Joel Sternfeld on his classic 'American Prospects' – and his new work," *British Journal of Photography*, February 7, 2017, https://www.bjp-online.com/2017/02/sternfeld. Interestingly, the article describes his new work as "images augmented with fact-centric captions."

[35] Peter Lamarque, *Work and Object: Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17.

The interplay between a photograph and its accompanying text opens up the possibility of an affective reading.[36] While it is possible to express emotion solely by visual means, my argument is that texts prompt an emotional response that certain pictorial genres have difficulty eliciting on their own. Portraiture tends to facilitate such a response, but other genres like still life or non-figurative works confront greater difficulties.[37] With urban landscapes, particularly those in which human figures are absent or do not play a significant role, the viewers' potential lack of familiarity with the depicted location can inhibit an emotional response to the picture.

The expression of human emotions is not a regulated system, but a fluid process that changes depending on a number of social, psychological and physiological factors. I focus here on articulations of feeling by artists through their work, and the tangible ways in which these are picked up and interpreted by an audience. It is important to note that there is no shared definition of the term 'affect' among the many disciplines that use it, since each one studies it with widely different objectives in mind. In many contexts, it is possible to use 'affect' and 'emotion' synonymously, since the distinction between the two terms is less marked in psychology and sociology – the fields that focus on discourse and habitus – than in the life sciences, where the former usually refers to preconscious intensities and the latter to specific mental states. [38]

Affects are notoriously hard to pin down or measure in the same way as other mental and bodily processes. Consequently, we need to acknowledge that the distinct

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[36] As the pairing of text and image constitutes a particular instance of encountering information about the world, it is worth studying whether the order in which the viewers encounter these elements has an influence on their perception of the work.

[37] For instance, Nigel Thrift writes about the affect of Bill Viola's work, concentrating on the affective potentiality of the faces and hands of the performers. Nigel Thrift, "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 86, no. 1 (2004): 57-78.

[38] For an overview of the terms affect, emotion and feeling as applied to recent photographic practices and theories, see Thy Phu, Elspeth H. Brown, and Andrea Noble, "Feeling in photography, the affective turn, and the history of emotions," in *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory*, ed. Mark Durden and Jane Tormey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020). For a concise psychological definition of affect and emotion, see Antonio Damasio and Hanna Damasio, "What is an Emotion?" in *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*, ed. Andrew Fox, et al., Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

affective readings that viewers make of photographs will always be dependent on their individual subjectivity and on the cultural context in which these readings take place. [39] If, and when, affects arise will involve an organic relation between the viewer and the work.

In critical theory, the notion of affect has been closely aligned with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (influenced in turn by the writings of Spinoza), and further developed by theorists such as Brian Massummi and Nigel Thrift. Massumi understands affect as the opposite of discourse, and therefore as an autonomous potentiality that transmutes into intensity.[40] Like many of those in the Deleuzian camp, he disregards the social context in which affects take place, concentrating instead on the bodily processes that precede consciousness. "Affect", Massumi maintains, "*is* the whole world: from the precise angle of its differential emergence," a conception that is too broad to be useful when discussing real-world situations whose outcome are written narratives.[41]

Similarly, Thrift equates affect with the non-representational – an epistemological position that considers subjectivities beyond the human.[42] Nevertheless, since Thrift works in the field of cultural geography (often in collaboration with Ash Amin), he offers an attractive way of thinking about the relationship between affect and place, and how our lives are intrinsically related to the

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[39] I am restricting my comments to the moment and context in which viewers encounter works of art in real-world settings such as books and physical and virtual exhibition spaces. There are many other possibilities of studying affect in relation to art, such as the qualitative assessment of viewers' somatic or neuronal responses to specific stimuli. For an overview of some of these scientific approaches, see Paul J. Silvia, "Emotional Responses to Art: From Collation and Arousal to Cognition and Emotion," *Review of General Psychology* 9, no. 4 (2005): 342-57.

[40] "Intensity is beside that loop, a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder." Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation. Post-contemporary Interventions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 25.

[41] Ibid., 43. On actual narratives, Massumi states that "linguistic expression can resonate with and amplify intensity at the price of making itself functionally redundant" (25-6). For a pointed critique of Massumi's conception of affect, see Clare Hemmings, "Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn," *Cultural Studies* 19, no. 5 (2005): 548-67.

[42] "Non-representational theory is resolutely anti-biographical and pre-individual. It trades in modes of perception which are not subject-based." Nigel Thrift, *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge, 2007), 7.

infrastructure of cities.[43] Amin and Thrift put forward the compelling argument that "human identities and affects in the city are both coproduced and pumped around, with much of the work done by an urban landscape that has become increasingly sentient."[44] By this the duo seek to question "what counts as 'human' in that setting, and how cities complicate and sometimes completely unravel this distinction."[45]

Perhaps more useful for my purposes, given that my work is concerned with human subjectivity and the context in which that subjectivity is formed, is the psychosocial approach of Margaret Wetherell, for whom there is no hard distinction between ordinary occurrences, the way people behave, and the way they speak.[46] Wetherell wants to find ways to engage with "phenomena that can be read simultaneously as somatic, neural, subjective, historical, social and personal."[47] Her approach is less mystifying than Deleuzian affect theory, mainly because it is centered around the *praxis* of affect, which makes her rationalizations more concrete.

Similarly, Kathleen Stewart's book *Ordinary Affects* mixes theory and practice through short narratives that show how they manifest themselves in everyday life. While Stewart's definition of ordinary affects as "surging capacities" that give our existence "the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences" is still influenced by Deleuze, her intriguing approach incorporates her own experience, making it easier to connect with theoretical notions that can be otherwise hard to identify with.[48] In the section "Odd Moments" Stewart describes a

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[43] "An everyday urbanism has to get into the intermesh between flesh and stone, humans and non-humans, fixtures and flows, emotions and practices." Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 9.
[44] Ibid., 4.
[45] Ibid., 68.
[46] "Affect is inextricably linked with meaning-making and with the semiotic (broadly defined) and the discursive. It is futile to try to pull them apart." Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding* (London: Sage, 2012), 20.
[47] Ibid., 11.
[48] Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-2.

familiar situation in which vision, discourse and spatial considerations play an important role:

> At odd moments in the course of the day, you might raise your head in surprise or alarm at the uncanny sensation of a half-known influence. The streets are littered with half-written signs of personal/public disasters. The daily sightings of the homeless haunt the solidity of things with the shock of something awful. They hold up signs while puppies play at their feet: "Hungry," "Will work for food," "God bless you." *The sign hits the senses with a mesmerizing and repellent force*. It pleads to be recognized, if only in passing. […] The eye glances off the graphic lettering of the homeless sign as something to avoid like the plague. But the sign also prompts the surge of affect toward a profound scene.[49]

In the episode Stewart describes, the affect is produced by several visual cues that make the subject uncomfortable, not knowing how to look or act. The 'force' and 'surge' in the passage is left undescribed, but we can sense how what was seen had an impact on the person. While affect is mostly discussed in terms of reception rather than of representation, I believe that it can be encoded in images through the use of text in analogous ways to other formal qualities, so that viewers generate their own emotions when they interact with the images.[50]

Barthes coined the term *studium* to designate the formal and technical qualities of an image and its historical context, "a contract arrived at between creators and consumers" in which they "read the Photographer's myths in the Photograph, fraternizing with them but not quite believing them."[51] In contrast, his term *punctum* describes the viewer's emotional investment in the photograph. This affective relation

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[49] Ibid., 60. My emphasis.
[50] This is not so different from how affect is communicated in literature. See Stephen Ahern, ed., *Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice: A Feel for the Text* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
[51] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 28.

with the image can be elicited through an idiosyncratic interpretation of an (often) accidental detail or an alteration in the viewer's perception of time. For Barthes, the *punctum*, if felt at all, complicates our reading of a photograph and can extend our considerations about it beyond the visual information it contains.[52]

I do not believe these two responses can be divided so conclusively, since engaging with the author's intentions and biography often leads to a genuine affective response. Surely there must be, from the artist's perspective, a strategy that achieves a similar effect of the *punctum*. While Barthes describes the process of "animating" a photograph – i.e., engaging with it with intensity and intention, he never discusses how an image's affective capacity may depend on having specific a priori knowledge.[53] In a famous passage where he discusses a portrait of Lewis Payne, the young man who was hanged for his attempt to assassinate the secretary of state in 1865, Barthes describes the image's disjunctive temporality in which the accused "is dead and is going to die."[54] We can easily deduce that Payne has been long dead when confronted with his portrait, but to achieve that same affective reading of it, we must somehow be familiar with his story and know that Payne was awaiting his imminent death when the picture was taken.

Indeed, Barthes posits that the relation between *studium* and *punctum* is a "matter of a co-presence."[55] This bond means that there is space for the artist's intentions, which can arise from his or her feelings and encoded via the use of text, while still leaving room for the affects the viewer might produce of their own accord. Barthes puts a premium on the perceptual presence that photography facilitates,

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[52] For instance, in relation to a necklace worn by a woman in a group portrait by James Van Der Zee, Barthes asserts that "once there is a *punctum,* a blind field is created (is divined): on account of her necklace, the black woman in her Sunday best has had, for me, a whole life external to her portrait." Ibid., 57.
[53] Ibid., 20. "As a *Spectator* I was interested in Photography only for "sentimental reasons"; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, I observe, and I think." Ibid., 21.
[54] Ibid., 96.
[55] Ibid., 42.

wishing to reconstruct an image with his eyes closed "to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness."[56] I believe that language can expand precisely the kind of emotional categories that become more obvious when we shut our eyes. Similarly, I am interested in the moment when an audience realizes that an image they had not considered in emotional terms, suddenly triggers a sensory experience that envelops them: this is what happened to me with Sternfeld's *On this Site* and with some of the works that I will examine in the following chapters. The consideration of these examples will allow me to extend the somewhat schematic theoretical observations of this chapter.

[56] Ibid., 55.

III. Some Concerns About Urban Landscape Photographs

The urban landscape contains the physical structures that constitute modern societies, forming the stage where the majority of people's lives play out. We, as such, are bound to develop feelings towards our immediate environment, even if the demands of daily life make those feelings hard to define. The narratives that come out of this process are an important part of our perception of a place. The urban geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has written that "a great city may be seen as a construction of words as well as stone."[57] Tuan is concerned with how these words have the "power to endow a site with vibrant meaning," and the ways in which they capture human activity.[58] Nevertheless, it is common for urban landscapes to appear natural or obvious, when in fact they are socially produced through a variety of factors, including our own subjectivity.[59] For the critic Elizabeth Grosz, "the form, structure, and norms of the city seep into and effect all the other elements that go into the constitution of… subjectivity. It effects the way the subject sees others, as well as the subject's understanding of, alignment with, and positioning in space."[60]

Urban theorists, extending this notion of subjective perception, have described the urban landscape as a kind of transparent image that we need to learn how to *read*.[61] Photography is a useful tool to document and interpret the complexities of our environment. The modern city, and the everyday life of its inhabitants, has long been a

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[57] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81, no. 4 (1991): 686.
[58] Ibid., 687.
[59] The geographer Edward Relph describes how the constitution of the modern urban landscape, which he dates to the second industrial revolution, can be attributed to "architecture, technological innovations, planning, and social developments," which he discusses visually in terms of texture, hardness, opacity, and movement. Edward Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 7.
[60] Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities" in *Sexuality and Space,* ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 248-9.
[61] See in particular Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960). For an essay that summarizes the notion that the urban landscape is a language and considers the implications of electronic mediation see Edward Relph, "Landscape as a Language Without Words," in *Handbook of the Changing World Language Map*, ed. Stanley Brunn and Roland Kehrein (Cham: Springer, 2018), doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73400-2_77-1/.

topic of inspiration for artists, who have engaged with it in different capacities.[62] In what follows, I will analyze different kinds of images of the urban landscape and the functions that texts play in their construction of meaning.

There is, perhaps, little to be gained from seeking to identify boundaries as to what exactly constitutes an urban landscape photograph. I do not use the term 'cityscapes' because these suggest to me wide vistas from elevated vantage points, or a constrained focus on densely populated areas with high-rises. I understand the term 'urban landscape' as encompassing everything contained in the public spaces of cities. As such, it does not exclude panoramic views, but it is open enough to include pictures of details and other atmospheric features. A bench, the cracks in the asphalt, a reflection, or the darkness of an underpass, just to give a few examples, would be equally representative of this pictorial genre. They are all signs worthy of attention and the 'text' that contains them is the street.[63] As a genre of fine art photography, urban landscapes are very different from the two other established kinds of photography that depict the city: street photography and architectural photography.

Urban landscapes investigate space and the objects contained in that space, whereas 'street photographs' tend to privilege the apprehension of a fleeting moment.[64] Street photographs usually function as self-contained narratives, trying to find significance in the accidental choreographies and visual paradoxes of everyday life. [65]

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[62] I formulate this point in relation to other studies which treat the architecture and planning of the city itself as a work of art, as opposed to representations of it. See Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

[63] For a discussion of buildings as signs, as well as of actual road and commercial signs, see Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977).

[64] Urban landscapes can also aid in preserving vernacular architecture and other forms of 'low' culture that shape everyday life, a point Brian Wallis makes in the introduction to George Tice's aptly titled collection of images. Tice's pictures show how a nostalgic sensibility can rise above complacency to become a critical impulse that questions the myths of the so-called 'American Way of Life.' See George Tice, *Urban Landscapes* (New York: Norton, 2002), 13.

[65] There is no agreed upon definition for 'street photography'. While logic dictates that it applies to any photograph made in the street or of a street, the term has come to define a particular working method that usually entails the use of small format cameras to capture 'decisive moments.' For a recent compendium

The emphasis is on people and their actions, arrested in a split second thanks to the skill of the photographer and her ability to get close to the event in question. The more intensely we are able to feel like we are part of it, the more accomplished the photograph is. Many of these pictures are taken on the fly by photographers who travel the world searching for grand moments, which means that the relation between the photographer and the place depicted is often inconsequential. In the best of cases, the photographer builds an image archive over the years on a particular city, region, or country.

Such is the case of Alex Webb's image of children playing outside of a church in Tehuantepec [fig. 5], which is part of his book on Mexico *La Calle* (2016).[66] Here, the street and the church are merely the background for the main scene of interest, made meaningful by the proximity of the subjects, by the ball spinning, and the improbable clash of blue tones and striped elements. The expressions and the actions do not need to be extraordinary, since what is remarkable is how Webb tied all of this together. While the picture gives a sense of the liveliness of the place, it tells little about the urban characteristics of the city. Many street photographs are instantiations of compositional prowess that do not exploit a political position but are content with transforming everyday life into spectacle.

The second distinction is with architectural photography, which, independently of its visual sophistication, is made for the practical purpose of promoting, selling, or preserving buildings. These photographs tend to emphasize the line, light, and texture of forms as devised by designers, engineers, and planners. It is common for them to desire that their buildings are rendered timeless in the photographs, arresting the newness of their accomplishments.

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that tries to open up this definition, see Jackie Higgins, *The World Atlas of Street Photography* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014).

[66]Alex Webb, *La Calle: Photographs of Mexico* (New York: Aperture, 2016).

Technically, the depiction of scale in architectural photography communicates the foremost qualities of built structures, usually through the use of view cameras that correct perspective, attain a pronounced depth of field, and reduce distortion.[67] In contrast, art photographs of the urban landscape include indicators of time to ground it in a specific sociopolitical moment, often disrupting the fetishes of architectural form, even if they employ the same equipment and techniques. I subscribe to the argument that photographs of the urban landscape "create their own form of space," which "unconsciously affects the way the subject's mental images" are shaped for both practical and symbolic purposes.[68] In this more abstract realm, the depiction of the urban landscape ceases to be a purely instrumental endeavor and becomes a prime subject for critical reflection and aesthetic production.

The work of Gabriele Basilico is a good example to illustrate this tension between an artistic and a pragmatic interpretation of spaces and structures [fig. 6]. While many of Basilico's images share the instrumentality of architectural photographs, the best of them investigate how places have been shaped by a mixture of development and contingency. In an image of Krausenstrasse from his series *Berlin* (2000), Basilico brings attention to the challenges and opportunities that redevelopment will create once construction ceases [fig. 7]. The big empty lot to the left is characteristic of the promise of equality, collectivity, and understanding that people associated with Berlin throughout the 90s. While the two residential towers dominate the composition, the real subject of the image is the sociopolitical reality it subtly portrays, offering an opportunity to question the spatial relation between the office building on the right, the

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[67] For more an informative analysis of the representation of scale in architectural photography, see Claire Zimmerman, "The Monster Magnified: Architectural Photography as Visual Hyperbole," *Perspecta* 40 (2008): 136-47.

[68] Edward Whittaker, "Photography and the Subject of Architecture," in *Camera Constructs: Photography, Architecture and the Modern City*, ed. Andrew Higgott and Timothy Wray (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 132. Further to this point, Beatriz Colomina has argued that architecture, space and representations cannot be separated, an amalgam that helped define our idea of the modern city. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

ads by Deutsche Bahn and Coca-Cola in the foreground, and the International style high-rise in the background. The deadpan stance and overcast light render every element of the scene with equal importance, giving an impression of neutrality that withholds moral judgment.[69]

Basilico's photograph does not make it obvious what we should think, nor does it draw undue attention to his style and technique. As a trained architect, Basilico believed that photographing a city meant "living an intense and emotional relationship that allows room for sentiment because it is alive and volatile."[70] His visual exploration involved "a series of experiences, emotions and thoughts" put at the service of making cities "decipherable."[71] The way the Krausenstrasse picture was made serves the purpose of examining the scene with as much clarity as possible. It should be noted, however, that even if Basilico was drawn to the idea that landscapes are affective, the photograph itself offers no contextual information indicating whether the site had any personal significance for him.

This connection between the artist and the urban landscape has been literalized by Nicholas Nixon in his exhibition *Self & City*, which combines views of Boston with extreme close-ups of his own body [fig. 8]. The analogy between the city and the body is an established topos in urbanism that gained traction in the 19th century, when poor industrial areas were described as diseased and in need of a cure, which came in the form of sanitation, surveillance and redevelopment.[72] Nixon has a long history of photographing his hometown, starting with the wide views of the city included in the

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[69] *Berlin* was commissioned by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD). Basilico photographed the city over three trips, all made in 2000. See Gabriele Basilico, *Berlin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002).
[70] Gabriele Basilico, *Cityscapes* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 373.
[71] Ibid., 370.
[72] A summary of such analogies, and how they influenced the urban policies of emergent metropolises, can be found in James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London: Athlone, 1999), 27-37.

seminal exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*.[73] He has declared in relation to those pictures that his idea was "to put my feelings in service to clear description. When I moved to Boston in 1974, I was enthralled with it and was trying to figure it out. Getting on rooftops was a great way to learn… to see more."[74] The gallery press release for *Self & City* describes the exhibition as a "meditation of one's own place in the urban thicket," which suggests a process of identity formation based on establishing meaningful affinities with places.[75]

Unfortunately, no further information is supplied about the buildings. While we can easily link their materiality with Nixon's body, the work itself does not provide elements to connect specific qualities of the architecture with the artist's emotions for the state capital. Put another way, we can speculate about the ways in which Nixon has been influenced by his experience of living in Boston, and even imagine how his body has aged alongside these buildings, perhaps even inside them, but we are left wondering how these structures have shaped his subjectivity. This missing link underscores how creating a sense of intimacy through the use of the body does not automatically lead to an affective interpretation of a place.

The photographer Robert Adams once remarked that Nixon's pictures "speak to us in part by what he declines to tell us."[76] In *View East from Pi Alley* (2008), the obvious correlations between face and facade, torso and edifice, mouth and window, alert us to the vulnerability of the environment as living organism, but they do not communicate the same authenticity as Nixon's body because they are not codified in a

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[73] For the history and impact of the 1975 exhibition, see Britt Salvesen and Alison Nordström, eds., *New Topographics […]* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009).
[74] Daniel Augschöll and Anya Jasbar, "Interview with Nicholas Nixon," *Ahorn Magazine*, http://www.ahornmagazine.com/issue_9/interview_nixon/interview_nixon.html. My emphasis.
[75] The exhibition took place at San Francisco's Frankel Gallery, from 9 July – 15 August 2009. The quote is from the press release. https://fraenkelgallery.com/exhibitions/self-and-city/. Whereas the fantastically detailed pictures (made with an 11x14 in camera) were interspersed in the gallery space, they were separated by subject matter into two distinct sections in the monograph *Close Far*. See Nicholas Nixon, *Close Far* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013).
[76] Robert Adams, *Art Can Help* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 43.

way that makes his experience known to viewers [fig. 9]**.** While Nixon renders the robust Winthrop-Carter building with an anthropomorphic tenderness that allows us to consider it beyond its practical use, further supplementary information could have led to a richer interpretation of his connection to this particular structure.[77]

On the other hand, not every text will consistently supply an urban landscape photograph with an affective connotation. In his book *The Structure of Things Then* (1998), David Goldblatt provides ample contextual information through extended captions to inform the viewer about the "densely complex matrix of cultural, social, political, and economic interaction from which the subjects photographed emerged."[78]

His photograph *Flushing Meadows* depicts an unpaved shantytown with no proper streets and houses made of corrugated metal sheets [fig. 10]. The sturdier of them, made of brick, are visible near the tall streetlamp in the center of the composition, although the prevalent lack of roofs suggests the precarious ebb and flow with which materials are reused. The other masts on the horizon indicate the scale of this settlement, while the fence on the lower right-hand corner situates us just outside its bounds. Goldblatt has described the structures he captures as "eloquent of the needs, preferences, imperatives and values of those who made and use them, and of the ideologies upon which their beliefs and lives may have been contingent."[79] *Flushing Meadows* is politically loaded, and Goldblatt is invested in communicating ideas that might not be obvious to international audiences:

> At the top of each pole was a cluster of high-intensity lamps which was first applied in Soweto in the early 1970s to counter the

[77] *View East from Pi Alley* may seem like an architectural photograph, except that the aesthetic decisions behind the manner Nixon exposed, printed, and displayed it has opened up the possibility for viewers to interpret it according to more subjective criteria.

[78] David Goldblatt, *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10.
[79] David Goldblatt, *Structures of Dominion and Democracy* (Göttingen: Steidl 2018), 239.

> *tsotsis* who, preferring darkness for their robberies, easily knocked out ordinary street lamps by throwing stones at them. However, these lights on their tall stalks were beyond their range and firearms were not then ubiquitous. But the device soon transcended its original application: It was most useful to the security forces in maintaining control in Black townships. High level lights sprouted in almost every 'location' in the country, even in small rural townships where crime was hardly a problem.[80]

The caption expands on the significance of the picture's most prominent element, the streetlamp, but it also informs us about aspects that are external to what is being shown. Goldblatt's use of words makes it harder for the viewer to settle on clichés or preconceptions about its subject matter. Nevertheless, nothing in the image or the caption establishes a personal connection between the author and the place.

Images that examine the social use of urban space but that also aspire to be read in emotional terms are not very common. I am not referring here to those situations in which viewers can relate emotionally to a picture because of their previous knowledge or experience of a place. Instead, I am concerned with how artists make affect communicable to an audience. I am not claiming that all photographs of the urban landscape require captions or some other linguistic component, nor am I proposing that visual information cannot be affective in and of itself. I fully accept that visual means are capable of communicating many aspects of human experience that escape language.

What I am suggesting, however, is that language is frequently necessary to speak to an audience certain emotions elicited by an urban landscape or contained in its history. Deadpan images such as Basilico's, Nixon's, and Goldblatt's have been

[80] Goldblatt, *The Structure…*, 185. The caption is slightly longer, describing the township of Khayelitsha.

described as a kind of photographic *degree zero* that liberates the image from rhetoric to determine its reception, that is, from the need for linguistic context.[81] This phenomenon in which viewers do not consider the photographic object as a complex device but merely focus on the subject matter it depicts is called photographic 'transparency,' which can be further described as "the analogy between the structural nature of depiction and our skills of recognition in normal perception."[82] Transparency is often exploited for rhetorical gain when the aim is to confound the viewer's expectations through an image's apparent neutrality. When artists want to have more certainty that audiences will read their pictures in affective terms, they resort to paratexts.

[81] Colin Westerbeck describes the 'documentary style' of Walker Evans' as one such attempt at 'neutrality'. See Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography*, rev. ed. (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2017) 246-50. Photographic transparency can be compared to what Barthes described as a *degree zero* in literature, when realist conventions become "more artificial than that which set out to give the most accurate description of Nature." Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 67.

[82] Andrew Harrison, "A minimal syntax for the pictorial: the pictorial and the linguistic – analogies and disanalogies" in *The Language of Art History*, ed. Ivan Gaskell and Salim Kemal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 228.

IV. Three Case Studies: Hanzlová, Leonard and Takagi

While in the previous chapter I discussed different approaches to photographing the urban landscape, I will now examine how different types of texts shape a photographic discourse, looking closely at three kinds of paratexts: the artist statement (Jitka Hanzlová), the title (Zoe Leonard), and the epigraph (Madoka Takagi). In these cases, the texts predispose viewers towards an emotional interpretation of their associated images. I am particularly interested in the potential disconnect between the artist's intentions and the works themselves, probing whether the interpretive prompts made by these associated paratexts reverberate in the images. The three female photographers that feature here rely on their biography as a strategy to complement the visual narrative proposed by their pictures.[83]

The weaving of an artist's biography into a visual discourse plays a crucial role in Jitka Hanzlová's first series *Rokytník* (1990-4), which explores issues of identity in relation to memory and place.[84] The political climate of the Cold War forced the young Hanzlová into exile from her small village in Czechoslovakia. After some initial difficulties, she was granted asylum in Germany. Settling down in Essen, she enrolled at the Folkwang University to study Visual Communication. Hanzlová started documenting her native rural town once she was able to move freely after the fall of the Berlin Wall. She was particularly interested in how the changes brought about by globalization were impacting the two countries differently.[85] The title of the series, *Rokytník,* conceptually composites forty-two images of different genres into a portrait of a place.

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[83] I am fully aware that considering an artist's biography and intention is only one of many interpretive methods available. It is, however, the one I thought more appropriate for analysing these works.
[84] Jitka Hanzlová, *Rokytník* (Velbert: Museum Schloß Hardenberg ,1997).
[85] Isabel Tejeda, the curator of the Hanzlová retrospective at the Fundación MAPFRE, described as "fundamental" the relation of the artist's biography to her work. Jitka Hanzlová, *Jitka Hanzlová* (Madrid: TF Editores, 2012), 17.

Hanzlová tends to frame people at a slight distance to interrelate their appearance and actions with their environment. In one of the most circulated images of the series, that of a poised boy holding a toy sword and a shield, Hanzlová fills the upper half of the frame with information that shows the particularities of the place. Rokytník, we gather from the photograph, seems to be the type of small town where everyone knows each other, and kids can play around at dusk unattended [fig. 11]. Critics have celebrated Hanzlová's portraits, glossing over the role that the urban landscape plays in *Rokytník* and how pictures in a sequence are "elements of a narrative that, in the absence of an explanatory framework, has to be imagined by the beholder."[86]

It is precisely her backstory that creates the impression that a place is being represented with authenticity and insight. Lucy Soutter has described the quest for authenticity in contemporary photography as a "mode of address" similar to the one we find in literature, in which "the authentic can be constructed, modulated and nuanced through narrative."[87] Hanzlová has encoded her work with her emotions by consistently connecting the images to her biographical narrative through press releases, interviews and wall texts.[88] Over the years, these paratextual components have had a cumulative impact on the way Hanzlová's images are contextualized. I am adhering here to an understanding of authenticity related to works in which the artist tried to reflect who

[86] Maren Polte, "Time and Order: Self-Reflective Strategies in Photo Essays" in *Time and Photography*, ed. Jan Baetens, et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), 106. Kristin Jones, for example, believes that the portraits "remain the most potent distillation of Hanzlová's blend of beauty and taxonomy." Kristin M. Jones "Going Solo," *Frieze*, March, 2003. https://www.frieze.com/issue/article/going_solo/.
[87] Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 88-89.
[88] For a biographical sketch in the artist's own words, see "Jitka Hanzlová", filmed October 2012 at the International Center of Photography, video, https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/media/jitka-hanzlova/. Philip Block, in his introduction to the talk, describes Hanzlová's work as "at once very personal, about herself, her emotions, her memory," contributing to the perpetuation of the artist's myth.

they are to the best of their capacity.[89] Expanding on this view, the literary critic Lionel Trilling believes that

> the artist seeks his personal authenticity in his entire autonomousness – his goal is to be as self-defining as the art object he creates. As for the audience, its expectation is that through its communication with the work of art, which may be resistant, unpleasant, even hostile, it acquires the authenticity of which the object itself is the model and the artist the personal example.[90]

Hanzlová's biography is also an important point of reference for her second series, *bewohner* (1994-6), which has been described as "a pictorial meditation on the fate of the people who live and work in a big city amidst collective anonymity."[91] It was published as a slim book with a carefully selected sequence of twenty-five pictures: nine portraits, nine 'spaces', four objects and three animals.[92] But while it is easier to connect Hanzlová's personal story with *Rokytník's* rural atmosphere, *bewohner's* eclectic selection makes it harder to find a narrative we can cling to. There is no discernable narrative or symbolic anchor to help us make sense of the images. It is noteworthy that they were taken in a number of different cities (Paris, Berlin, Cologne and Essen), but it seems as if Hanzlová wanted to downplay the particularities of these distinct geographies. The discontinuities of place hinder the discovery of common ground between the images, especially since most of them are composed in a way that encumbers the identification of their setting.

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[89] For a helpful summary of the vexed concept of 'authenticity,' see Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). For a conception of authenticity that considers the problems around the reproduction, attribution, and variation of fine art photographic prints, see Nigel Warburton, "Authentic photographs," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 37, no. 2 (1997): 129-137.
[90] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 100. I am aware of postmodern views that render authenticity impossible because we have become decentered subjects with fluid identities and fragmented subjectivities. Nevertheless, I find Trilling's view productive for an analysis that considers the artist's intentions in the reception of their work.
[91] Hanzlová, *Jitka Hanzlová*, 55.
[92] Jitka Hanzlová, *bewohner* (Winterthur: Fotomuseum, 2001), unpaged.

Such is the case with Hanzlová's image of a residential structure in an undisclosed German city [fig. 12]. It is even hard to tell whether it is a single-family house or a small apartment building – recalling Diane Arbus' famous statement that "a photograph is a secret about a secret; the more it tells you the less you know."[93] The sparseness of the building's architectural style suggests that it is midcentury construction. While it may have been originally built for the expanding suburban working class, the absence of graffiti, the good state of the roof, the pale decorative stripe, and the narrow stone groove, point to a middle-class neighborhood. Nonetheless, Hanzlová gives us few reasons to linger on the image for visual pleasure. To imagine a Rapunzel-like figure trapped in the heights of that tiny attic window would be to force the imagination beyond what is contained in the frame.

Hanzlová has revealed that she had an "extremely difficult" time during her pregnancy and that this made her feel at odds in the urban environment of her adoptive country, a sentiment that supposedly informs the structure and content of *bewohner*.[94] Once we know this anecdotal information, we can interpret the pictures as a reaction against large urban spaces and the adverse effects they can have on our relationships with others.[95] It is difficult, however, to recognize this anxiety just from looking at the pictures, especially since they are untitled and devoid of captions. Without such contextual information, the only commonality amongst them is Hanzlová's subjective viewpoint and visual style.

John Berger has written about the "unnamable" events captured by Hanzlová's photographs "after we have made an inventory of everything that is recognizable."[96] It

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[93] Diane Arbus, "Five Photographs by Diane Arbus," *Artforum International*, May 1971, 64.
[94] Hanzlová, *Jitka Hanzlová*, 21.
[95] For an analysis of the anecdote as a narrative typology that establishes a public image of the artist, see Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
[96] John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph*, ed. Geoff Dyer (London: Penguin, 2013), 205. Berger is writing about Hanzlová's series *Forest* (2000-05), which collects images of nature from an unnamed Moravian wilderness.

seems that the picture of the residential structure aspired to communicate such an unnamable residue in the urban landscape, but its condemnation of big cities ends up too vague and generic.[97] For me, this makes her second series feel forced in its display of authenticity. The photograph of *bewohner* described above makes me think of architectural modernism and not of Hanzlová's experience of the place where it was made, and only makes sense once we compare it to the rural structures in *Rokytník*. In my view, *bewohner* reads like a film with too many missing frames to be comprehended as an autonomous visual narrative, too dependent on her first book as its counterweight.

Hanzlová sought to influence the understanding of the pictures by opening the book with an Italo Calvino passage from *Invisible Cities* (1972): "However the city may really be, beneath this thick coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave Tamara without having discovered it."[98] But *bewohner's* pictures of places do not show the dense amalgamation of signs found in most cities, nor do they propose a perceptible sign system of their own. This makes it hard to feel the disconnect from city living that Hanzlová hints at. Victor Burgin has argued that, while viewers need to 'work' in order to decode a photograph, they can only do so with "what codes he or she is familiar with in order to *make sense*" of it.[99]

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[97] I would like to make a short observation concerning the relation between photography and the agents of change linked to the modernization of cities. In an essay on Fred Herzog's work, Jeff Wall questions whether images by mid-century photographers could be made today since the current state of our cities "cannot elicit that kind of feeling because they do not contain it." Jeff Wall, "Vancouver Appearing and Not Appearing in Fred Herzog's Photographs" in *Fred Herzog: Modern Color* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2017), 34-37. This entails shifting the task of communicating the authenticity of a place from the photographs to the places themselves. Although Wall is right in thinking that it is easier to connect emotionally with representations of the past, I believe his position is untenable since subjectivity and the passage of time allow for fluctuating responses to the places we experience, either in person or through a photograph.
[98] Italo Calvino, *Invisible* Cities (London: Vintage, 2009), 11.
[99] Victor Burgin, "Looking at Photographs" in *Thinking Photography*, 153. Emphasis in original.

It is not uncommon that artists manifest an expectation that viewers read their biographical work on emotional terms.[100] This prospect becomes improbable if they construct their discourse through material external to the photograph and not readily available when viewers encounter their work. It seems that our ability to assign Hanzlová's desired meaning to the *bewohner's* speculative narrative will depend on our familiarity with her biography and with her previous works, which is quite a lot to demand from the viewer.

There is a similar photograph of a building in a subsequent series entitled *Hier* (1998-2010).[101] Hanzlová's made these pictures in and around her adopted hometown of Essen [fig. 13]. While the subject matter is comparable, the framing is much tighter, allowing us to dwell longer on the details it highlights. The cracks on the side of the residential building are a consequence of the soil's instability in the Ruhr region, Germany's most prominent industrial area. *Hier* provides a more comprehensible narrative that still connects with the themes of progress, division, and foreignness present in her other books. By making the photographs visually attractive she facilitates the projection of our own emotions towards the place while also considering hers. While many of the pictures feel personal, this is a more conventional project that documents the artificial measures that bridge nature and culture. According to the gallery statement, the series is "an intensive exploration of the ecologically 're-naturated' 'civilized' landscape in and around Essen."[102] Although the series is less mystifying, the title is oblique but relevant.

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[100] "We can speak of *biographical image-making* when knowledge of the life of the artist is used in the interpretation of the work." Sandra Kisters, *The Lure of the Biographical: On the (Self-)Representation of Modern Artists* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017), 13. Emphasis in original.
[101] Jitka Hanzlová, *Hier* (Köln: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013).
[102] The exhibition *Jitka Hanzlová - Hier* took place at Berlin's Kicken Gallery, from 1 May – 5 June 2010. The quote is from the gallery statement. http://www.kicken-gallery.com/exhibitions/jitka-hanzlova-hier/.

In this respect, Genette reminds us that "if the text is an object to be read, the title is an object to be circulated."[103] A title can have a high degree of indeterminacy, but it should still feel like it is doing a service in favor of the work. What kind of discursive relation should the title have to the object, and what type of viewing experience does it propose when that relation is not clear? When is our experience compromised because of a lack of clarity in this relationship, reaching a point of diminishing returns? "The paradox of the work of art," stated Adorno, "is recapitulated and condensed in the title."[104]

Zoe Leonard's decade-long project *Analogue* (1998-2009) began as a direct response to the changes taking place in and around Manhattan's Lower East Side, where she had been a resident for twenty years [fig. 14]. After returning from a two-year stint in Alaska, Leonard realized the extent to which her neighborhood's identity was "underlined" by the "layered, frayed, and quirky beauty" of the storefronts from independent businesses.[105] The documentation of these establishments eventually extended to the rest of the city's boroughs, resulting in a compendium of butcheries, hair salons, massage parlors, discount stores and bodegas that detailed an image of a New York that was quickly vanishing. After a few years, Leonard's initial interest in urban renewal gave way to an expanded documentation of the trade routes of commodities, with a particular emphasis on used clothing, in a variety of shops and stalls in Uganda, Cuba, Poland, Mexico and Palestine.

The complete series comprises 412 photographs grouped thematically in 25 grids of up to 54 images [fig. 15]. This arrangement underscores the disjointed nature of the series, while bestowing the small unframed prints with a material presence that facilitates a comparative analysis of their diverse content. The different size of these

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[103] Genette, *Paratexts*, 75.
[104] Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 284.
[105] Zoe Leonard, *Analogue* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 1.

clusters produces a variety of pleasing rhythms that can be traced on the wall, although it soon becomes apparent that inspecting the images at close range does not lessen their ambiguity.

The series was also published as a book with a limited selection of eighty-three images, and the crucial inclusion of the essay *A Continuous Signal*, a collage of quotes edited by Leonard with surgical precision to make them appear as if written by a single author.[106] This text provides a valuable insight into the different strands that compose the project, providing the conceptual glue that connects themes as different as colonialism, urban planning, analogue technologies, and the passage of time. One of the most informative quotes in *A Continuous Signal* is by the cultural geographer J.B. Jackson: "No landscape, vernacular or otherwise, can be comprehended unless we perceive it as an organization of space; unless we ask ourselves *who owns or uses the spaces*, how they were created and how they change."[107] Jackson, who wrote extensively on the significance of ordinary landscapes, implies here that we need to address the perspective of the inhabitants in order to evaluate the remaking of an environment over time. Leonard has described the Lower East Side as "a kind of map of her life", and it is important to keep in mind that it was the alienating consequences of gentrification on the place where she lived that sparked *Analogue's* conception.[108]

There is no agreement among critics about how the subject matter of the series relates to its title, in which a seemingly simple word operates against the autonomy of a large number of photographs. Sophie Berrebi claims that it refers "primarily to photography as a descriptive tool," whose open structure recalls the nature of a digital

[106] For an extended analysis of *A Continuous Signal* as a textual collage see Sophie Berrebi, "Goats, Lamb, Veal, Breast: Strategies of Organization in Zoe Leonard's Analogue," *Afterall* 25 (2010): 30–7.
[107] Quoted in Leonard, *Analogue*, 174. My emphasis
[108] Ibid., 183. My emphasis. It is unfortunate that such a revealing statement is buried in the 'Acknowledgements' section of the colophon.

database that "exceeds its documentary function."[109] On this reading, *Analogue's* main objective seems to be its resistance to an identifiable master narrative, and the sense of closure that this would provide. The difficulty stems in part from the lack of contextual aides to help us make sense of the complex configuration of sites and subjects. To this end, the art historian Jordan Troeller has argued that some viewers may feel "linguistically abandoned" when deprived of captions that specify the date and location of the images.[110] However, even when this information is provided, as is the case in the book, Leonard's structuring logic remains enigmatic in how it demands to be put together, since not every image fits under the umbrella of a title that itself seems to be an analogy that never fully materializes.

A further consideration is that Leonard's uneven application of a deskilled aesthetic makes it difficult for viewers to combine the myriad strands of the work into a discernable discourse. Consider, for example, her decision to combine monochrome and color images without any consistency, a strategy presumably adopted to undermine a unitary mode of representation. Moreover, the pictures are not as uniform as their common print size suggests. While many of them demand a longer period of engagement because of their successful integration of form and content, many others are technically unbalanced.

Analogue occupies a strange position, in that it neither rejects traditional forms of documentary photography, nor does it align with the kind of expanded documentary practice that uses collage, text or the staging of events to complicate notions of truth. Nevertheless, Leonard's series as a whole does not fit within the definition of a postmodern image, in which pictures avoid establishing definitive semantic relations with the signified.[111] Linda Hutcheon, an early theorist of postmodernism, questioned

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[109] Berrebi, *Goats, Lamb, Veal, Breast*, 36-7.
[110] Jordan Troeller, "Against Abstraction: Zoe Leonard's Analogue," *Art Journal* 69, no. 4 (2010): 110.
[111] Douglas Crimp "Pictures,"*X-Tra*, Fall 2005, 20.

whether this type of reflexivity leads to "an empty play of codes."[112] In *Analogue's* case, it is arguable that this takes place through the overdetermined relation between the title and the images, which recalls Genette's cautioning against the seductiveness of some instrumental titles that end up working against the main text.[113] If we interpret *Analogue* solely through its title, a schism is apparent between a desire for conceptualism at the expense of authenticity. In this sense, the series is in accordance to how postmodern representational strategies have promoted a disengagement from the "indispensable *affective* process between subjects."[114]

The title of the series is also problematic if we accept the idea that photographs have a "metonymic capacity" to signal absences and desires beyond their informational content.[115] When Leonard first started the series, the personal and political dimension of the images intersected with the spirit of social resistance that has long characterized the Lower East Side. She has stated that *Analogue* was a "work of mourning" dedicated to those she lost to the AIDS epidemic as much as a reaction against the outstripping forces of gentrification.[116] Leonard is keen on imprinting her biography, nostalgia and political activism on the series. However, the problem here is that the pictures that relate to these aspects only amount to half of the project. If critical importance is to be granted to her connection to New York, and to the Lower East Side in particular, then her cultural remove from the other geographies represented in the series presents a challenge for how the work is perceived in affective terms.

Similar difficulties beset the attempt to view *Analogue* as a reflection on the effects of globalization, for it is equally difficult to get a sense of Leonard's "politics of

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[112] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 115.
[113] Genette, *Paratexts*, 80.
[114] Ernst Van Alphen, Mieke Bal and C. E. Smith, eds., *The Rhetoric of Sincerity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 5. Emphasis in original.
[115] Jane Tormey, *Cities and Photography* (Routledge: London, 2013), 81.
[116] "The people were gone, and the place was changing. It was a displacement and a loss of a whole community." Zoe Leonard, "A Conversation Featuring Artist Zoe Leonard," *MoMA Multimedia* video, 1:00:00, Filmed June 29, 2015, http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/323/1604

location."[117] There is no consistent way to know which images reflect the artist's emotions and which ones represent the gaze of the international surveyor. It is arguable that Leonard's visualization of commodity exchanges on a global scale comes at the cost of diluting the emotional power of her local discourse. The images of New York collectively capture a sense of loss, and the artist's investment in that loss, for we can see how most of the stores, even if still active when Leonard photographed them, show the marks of an expiring era. These independently owned stores, many with ties to ethnic or national communities, contributed through their graphic signage to the identity of the streets, and their closure results in a loss of visibility of the distinctive lifestyles that they made possible.

In attempting to make visible the mobility of objects, technologies and ideas across different nations, levels of development and cultural environments, Leonard ends up overlooking her own place in the fabric of everyday life in New York. Her eventual distancing from the motivations that lay behind the work is confusing given how successfully she used her identity and sexual orientation for emotional resonance in many of her previous works. For instance, in the photograph *Mari, I'm Sorry* (1995/1997), part of an untitled series of suggestive graffiti, the jotted plea on the side of a building is used to make a subtle yet explicit connection between the urban landscape, her biography and her feelings for the city [fig. 16]. Leonard frames the scene with enough negative space so that our gaze wanders freely before it fixes on the phrase, inviting us to read other elements in the frame as part of this mechanism of emotive visualization, such as the awkward shape of the building, the scrawls on the lower wall, and most importantly, the two leafless trees.[118]

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[117] Marsha Meskimmon, *Engendering the City: Women Artists and Urban Space* (London: Scarlet Press, 1997), 21.

[118] Leonard has consistently used trees as bearers of emotion. An example is the polyptych *Untitled* (2000) in which a pair of trees with plastic bags in their branches in a social housing complex suggests social and natural forces outside of one's control. Although there is no caption that describes these emotions, the repetition of the scene creates an intense sense of melancholy.

In his reflections on how the mind transposes small urban details and conflates them in confusing ways, the novelist André Aciman observed that: "New York is my home precisely because it is a place from where I can begin to be elsewhere — an analogue city, a surrogate city, a shadow city that allows me to naturalize and neutralize this terrifying, devastating, unlivable megalopolis by letting me think it is something else, somewhere else [...]"[119] Aciman's idea of an 'analogue city' foregoes the specificity of the local, and the feelings that it may elicit, to focus instead on the activity of connecting details that compose a memory image. Leonard's visual connections of places and objects over different cities across the globe correspond to this process of accrual. But while the mental composites described by Aciman probably have the fuzziness characteristic of the imagination, the documentary photographs in *Analogue* are bound to the particularities of the physical world. The forced connections she proposes amongst international sites neutralize their respective cultural idiosyncrasies.

The family-owned stores, makeshift stalls and similar street markets in the photographs made outside of the United States facilitate a way of life for people with limited social and economic prospects. In some cases, these businesses stand in specialized commercial districts competing against other similar establishments just outside of Leonard's frame. Such is the case with the crammed store selling cheap plastic products in Mexico City's La Merced, a market that has been in continuous operation since 1863 in what is one of the original quarters of the ancient city of Tenochtitlán [fig. 17]. Given this history, it is very unlikely that this shop will have the same fate as the establishments Leonard photographed in New York. *Analogue* is a rich and complex work, but it requires that the viewer does not question too emphatically the logic of the geographic relations of the pictures. Leonard has stated that her

[119] André Aciman, *False Papers: Essays in Exile and Memory*, (New York: Picador, 2001), 46.

aesthetic decisions were "calibrated towards creating a *feeling*," and this is an important piece of information to bear in mind when the work veers towards a more intellectual critique of globalization.[120]

A celebrated phrase by the Spanish philosopher Baltasar Gracián, who was active during the Baroque era, holds an unlikely insight into the conundrum posed by the relegation of affect in visual discourses: "What's the point of reason moving forward if the heart stays behind?"[121] Whereas *Analogue* is characterized by a conflicted emotional register, the New York photographs by the Japanese artist Madoka Takagi reveal an 'emotional truth' through the representation of the urban landscape.[122] In her series *My Place* (1989-90), Takagi adopts a modernist aesthetic to convey her condition as an outsider, responding intuitively to a range of sites throughout the city's five boroughs.[123] The publication opens with the following paragraph as the only insight into the artist's intentions:

> I came to New York to find something that I'd always wanted. I did not know what it was. Now I know. It was happiness. That was the beginning of the story.[124]

What the crux of the story is, how it progressed and how it ended remains a mystery. The fact that there is not much public information available about Takagi deepens the enigma. Whatever we conclude will have to originate from the pictures themselves in connection to the epigraph above.

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[120] Leonard, *A Conversation*. My emphasis.
[121] Baltasar Gracián, *El Héroe, Oráculo Manual y Arte de Prudencia* (Madrid: Castalia, 2003), 87. My translation. The original in Spanish reads: "¿Que importa que el entendimiento se adelante, si el corazón se queda?"
[122] See Ronald De Sousa, *Emotional Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). I am interested in De Sousa's concept of 'emotional truth' as it relates to the expression of authenticity in representations.
[123] A reevaluation of modernist photography took place at the time Takagi began her series in the early 80s, rethinking issues around resolution, print tonality and alternative processes that had fallen out of favor. See Lyle Rexer, *Photography's Antiquarian Avant-garde: The New Wave in Old Processes* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).
[124] Madoka Takagi, *My Place* (Tucson: Nazraeli Press, 2005), unpaginated. The photograph's locations are listed at the end of the book, but no further information is provided.

Unlike more conceptual projects by Takagi's contemporaries in New York, who distanced themselves from craft, fearing it might compromise their criticality, *My Place* seeks to derive significance from the formal and material qualities of the medium so that the images achieve an "autonomous presence."[125] Process and technique are paramount to this transfiguration into something more than literal representations of streets and buildings. The ghostly highlights of the platinum contact prints evoke the quality of a cinematic fadeout at the end of a flashback, akin to the moment when our mind loses its grip on a recollection that was hard to conjure. The consistent glow of Takagi's images, accentuated by the smooth bright paper, is the result of a particular printing technique, but it can also be interpreted as an instance of indeterminacy in connection to the paratext that opens the book. As is the case with *Analogue*, these images are also constrained by the weight of words, but the interaction between Takagi's title and the book's introduction sets up an intriguing puzzle that prompts the viewer to figure out her identity and the significance of these pictures in that inward journey.

To this end, we can interpret the inscriptions on several photographs as pointers of Takagi's quest for happiness, like the slogan 'Learn how to jump-start a life' in a Red Cross announcement, or the 'Love Me' next to an enigmatic female stick figure graffitied on a derelict building. Perhaps the most direct symbolic signage is in the picture of the eponymous street stall after which the series is named [fig. 18]. 'You are looking good' is written on an oddly placed mirror, a phrase that engages the imagination because the reassurance it tries to provide stands in contrast with the palpable precariousness of the stall and its grim financial future. While these markers do not entail a concrete set of symbols, they do make up an invisible network of

[125] Russell Ferguson, *Perfect Likeness: Photography and Composition* (Munich: Prestel, 2015), 11. Ferguson attempts to reconcile the critical faculties of contemporary art with photography's formalism, siding with the view that an aesthetic composition can "transcend simple representation." (9)

references that influence our perception of the uses of space, and how those alter the patterns and rhythms of a city. The scene has been preserved by the photograph with the sensibility of a conservationist, but it is sufficiently open to allow us to reach our own conclusions about the significance of these elements.

Several of Takagi's pictures feel like a continuation of Berenice Abbot's project *Changing New York*, albeit one in which the artist wishes to restrain the sociopolitical connotations of the urban landscape in favour of qualities that she found personally resonant. The book starts and ends, for instance, with photographs of buildings or structures onto which a shadow is cast, tempting us to interpret these projections as a stand-in for Takagi's looming subjectivity on the city. "Many contemporary artists use photography for social commentary, but this is not my interest," Takagi declared. "I intentionally avoid the intellectual socio-political concepts so prevalent in today's art world."[126] Despite this, a sense of political awareness is latent in *My Place*, which becomes evident when we consider the material qualities of the spaces depicted. David Harvey observes that "we may not even notice the material qualities of spatial orderings incorporated into daily life because we adhere to unexamined routines. Yet it is through those daily material routines that we absorb a certain sense of how spatial representations work and build up certain spaces of representation for ourselves."[127] I believe this to be the case with Takagi since her epigraph suggests that the city changed her identity and gave her life a different purpose.

Takagi's pictures have retained their currency by shying away from overtly symbolic interpretations, but there is a clear gap between the details that some of these pictures show in terms of social and urban history, and an emotional context that can only be fully communicated through words, which combined transpire her artistic

[126] Kentucky Art and Craft Foundation, "Madoka Takagi," http://www.kentuckycrafts.org/Madoka%20Takagi.htm
[127] David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 132.

sensibility. A case in point is the image of two identical brownstones divided by an empty lot [fig. 19]. The composition stresses the seductiveness of the unknowable, making us wonder what that sizeable gap contains, or the reason why the 'temple' on the left has fallen on hard times. While we can interpret the vulnerability of these surfaces as Takagi's attempt to merge the formal qualities of ruins with her own personal circumstances, there is enough information in the frame to persuade us to question the social conditions captured by the picture.

Photographs can alter drastically depending on the context. While the series of Hanzlová, Leonard, and Takagi hinge on words that provide an interpretive and organizational framework, they do so to varying extents and purposes. Neither of these series inherently depends on linguistic contextualization. That is, they can be appreciated without their paratexts. But as the novelist César Aira has written, "the mediation of images imposes a distance, and that distance opens up a space in which words can resonate and multiply their expression beyond what is utilitarian."[128] The space opened by Takagi at the intersection of image and text is directed towards an affective reading of the work. In contrast, the one by Leonard is geared towards intellectual reflection, as if her imperative had been to take herself out of the equation to avoid sentimentality, a common tendency in post-conceptual art. For those who believe that images should stand on their own, Hanzlová's work seems the easiest of the three to consume without reflection. The importance of paratexts depends on how much we believe that discourses surrounding the work should be considered. Given the vast potentiality of contemporary art, the predominance that institutional frameworks have on how and where we view artworks, and the valuable lessons from art history and critical theory, modes of reception that overlook the context of images seem to deprive viewers of receiving a more comprehensive set of elements to interpret them.

[128] César Aira, *On Contemporary Art* (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2018), 13.

V. Process and Practice

The two books that comprise the practice part of my submission share several features, even though the geographies they depict are far apart. *Border Documents* is a short biography of my father during his formative years in Ciudad Juárez in Mexico, while *A Certain Logic of Expectations* is a response to the social divide in Oxford between its ancient academic institution and the city at large. Both are documentary projects that question the prevalent portrayals of the cities they depict, proposing counter-narratives through a combination of photographs and texts to build a form of resistance against cliches, prejudice and disinformation. Neither is intended to provide a definitive representation of these cities or their histories. They are, instead, attempts at narrativizing the urban experience beyond the visual realm. This should not be interpreted as a lack of interest in the formal properties of the pictures. On the contrary, I am invested in the form, content and context of the photographs, and I conceived these projects in a critical dialogue with the history of documentary photography.

The decision to present the two series as books was as much a practical as a conceptual one, given that the printed page is a natural environment for the pairing of images and words, and the opportunities this affords for their arrangement in planned sequential and spatial arrangements. The material aspect of each of these publications, with their different sizes, papers and formats, propose two different models of engagement. *A Certain Logic of Expectations* is an 'artist's book,' while *Border Documents* has a more literary format.[129] Books lend themselves better than gallery installations to the presentation of large numbers of images, and they invite a closer

[129] The books presented for the examination have been printed with care and as close as possible to their final projected incarnation, particularly in terms of size. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that these are just maquettes, and that the materiality of the books (paper, binding, cover, etc.) will change when and if they get published.

reading of both mediums, with the texts modulating the act of turning through the pages.[130] The reader-viewer will hopefully feel compelled to question the content of the images and give sufficient weight to their respective textual components. Both books have a spatial focus that engages with different aspects of city life, making evident "the semantic space hidden behind the photograph" so that both media inform and enrich each other.[131]

The tone of these texts, and the kind of reflections they put forward, were made in the spirit of Georges Perec and his long inquiry into the *infraordinary*, the nothingness that encompasses the bulk of our lives.[132] Perec's writings offer a model of serious epistemological enquiry, albeit one with a *sui generis* structure. His projects are often fragmentary and absurd but he embraces with diligence the futility of the enterprise at hand. For instance, his book *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1974) highlights the complexity of micro-events, "what happens when nothing happens other than the weather, people, cars, and clouds."[133] Perec's selection criteria are non-hierarchical. He lists what he sees with barely any description and he avoids grand theoretical conclusions, letting the viewer determine the significance of his observations. Such a list exposes the partiality and selectivity of our attention and makes us question why we grant importance to certain things and not others.

Perec is aware of the subjectivity of his results, filtered as they are through his specific physical and symbolic point of view – which changes over the three days of his documentation – even if his data gathering appears objective. *An Attempt at*

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[130] I am not interested in words merely as design elements, nor as an iconoclastic posture in the spirit of conceptual art, where language is treated as an object. For a study of words used in a 'concrete' manner in contemporary art see Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).
[131] Valery Stigneev "The Text in Photographic Space" in *Poetics of Space: A Critical Photographic Anthology*, ed. Steven A. Yates. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 61.
[132] Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin, 2008), 210.
[133] Georges Perec, *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, trans. Marc Lowenthal (Cambridge: Wakefield, 2010), 3.

Exhausting a Place in Paris reveals the level of influence that a place, in this case Saint-Sulpice square, has on its documentation. The philosopher Paul Virilio, who appears in the text as a passerby crossing the square, describes Perec's project as trying to valorize "unknown things concealed by what is visible, things that are hidden not in the obscure, but in the obvious."[134] However, he also claims "there is something extraordinarily violent in Perec's poetics, [...] a sociological and political dimension that has been systematically ignored – or rather censored – under an excessive insistence on the aspect of play."[135] For me, the project's significance lies in producing a personal record of everyday life that also becomes a commentary of the social landscape of its time. Perec's method provides a fitting analogy for the making of documentary images, giving a realistic impression of the world while also connoting his personal vision.

It is all too easy to become self-indulgent when talking about memory in relation to places. Perec's stylistic austerity provided me with a model that allowed me to articulate – in a manner that consciously avoided sentimentality – my personal experiences of the urban landscape in *A Certain Logic of Expectations*, and, in *Border Documents* those of my father. The writing was subject to multiple reworkings, as I wanted to strike a relatable tone that captured the small, seemingly inconsequential episodes that constitute everyday life. Perhaps the main difference with Perec is that while he wanted to create an inventory of "strictly visible things," the texts in my projects are also concerned with describing extravisual affects.[136]

I also took a cue from Wright Morris' *The Inhabitants* (1946), particularly in conceptual terms, setting the images in a non-hierarchical relation with the texts. His accomplished images show how the power of light can transform our perception of

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[134] Walker, Enrique, and Paul Virilio. "Paul Virilio on Georges Perec." *AA Files*, no. 45/46 (2001), 17. www.jstor.org/stable/29544247.
[135] Ibid., 18.
[136] Perec, *An Attempt...*, 5.

vernacular structures and signage. However, he builds an exciting dialectic in which the texts capture the richness of colloquial speech, but also suggest the silences of emotions left unsaid. While it is true that Morris' words and images form a composite, the relation between them is abstract, with a multiplicity of anonymous narrators describing incidents that do not coalesce into a linear story. Morris wanted "each media to exist independently – until joined in the mind's eye of the reader [with] no illustrational ties."[137]

Morris' intention in *The Inhabitants*, then, could be described as giving *a sense of place*, using words as "an act of repossession."[138] This is ultimately what I have tried to do with my books as well, using words to repossess emotions that do not have a way of materializing on their own, adding another layer to the texture of everyday life. "To the extent the photograph is a ponderable object," Morris asserted, "it will have to be pondered with words."[139] I can find no better statement to summarize my intention with the two books I produced.

I describe in more detail each of them in the following chapters. I dedicate a longer discussion to *Border Documents* since I believe it is necessary to examine the sociopolitical issues besetting Ciudad Juárez, and the problems of representation to which this gives rise, whereas the issues and environment depicted in *A Certain Logic of Expectations* are more likely to be accessible and familiar to a European reader.

[137] Wright Morris, *The Inhabitants,* 2nd ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), unpaginated.
[138] Wright Morris, *Time Pieces: Photographs, Writing, and Memory* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 143.
[139] Wright Morris, *Photographs & Words* (Carmel: The Friends of Photography, 1982), 54.

VI. *Border Documents*

The infamous reputation of Ciudad Juárez began during the American Prohibition era, when the demand for bootleg alcohol gave rise to criminal organizations that managed its legal and illegal vices. The established view of this city as "the most immoral, degenerate and utterly wicked place" has long persisted in the American imaginary, but it was only after the horrific femicides of the mid-nineties that the barbaric image of Juárez solidified internationally.[140] The bright pink crosses that appeared all over the city commemorating the sites where women's bodies had been dumped became a symbol against gender-based violence, and a reminder of the complacency and collusion of the authorities in failing to solve these crimes.[141] Since then, governments formed from different parties have failed to find a political solution to the mounting social crisis, while the city's desert climate, limited cultural scene, and outdated public infrastructure have contributed little to changing its negative image.

According to the investigative writer Sergio González Rodríguez, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that came into effect in 1994 turned Juárez into a "nexus of bridge, wall and garbage dump" that "fed" on the surplus of cheap labor from Mexico's southern states to fuel the capitalist "machine."[142] The dehumanized workers employed by the newly established *maquiladoras* (assembly plants), along with high levels of corruption and impunity, rapidly degraded the social fabric of the city.[143] Roughly a decade later, the Mexican President Felipe Calderon declared a nationwide war on drugs that resulted in an uncontrollable escalation of *narcoviolence*,

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[140] Oscar J. Martínez, *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 57. That is how the U.S. consul John W. Dye described Juárez in 1921.
[141] For an account of these disturbing crimes, see Sergio González Rodríguez, *Huesos en el Desierto* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2002).
[142] Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, trans. Michael Parker-Stainback (Cambridge: Semiotext(e)/MIT Press, 2012), 37.
[143] Ibid., 29.

with Tijuana, Culiacán and Juárez at its center.[144] Danger, uncertainty and paranoia undermined the psychological wellbeing of the population and severely diminished civil life. The front page of the local newspapers would feature a death count for the previous day, which became the unofficial index of the violence. Survival depended on understanding the rapidly changing social conditions, establishing precautionary protocols, and identifying the best routes for secure transit. At the climax of the crisis, the entire police force was discharged for collusion with the *narcos*, and public morale reached its nadir. As a consequence, the streets were militarized, and an unofficial curfew was imposed.[145]

Despite these hardships, *Juarenses* exhibited a strong sense of endurance. However, their resilient efforts to deal with the conflict were ignored by national and international media alike, creating a gap in representation between the everyday reality of the majority of people and the reports that circulated in the press, which reduced a population of 1.5 million to mere collateral damage. Juárez was frequently described as the 'murder capital of the world,' a moniker that obfuscates the characteristics of the civil war, where the real enemy is the failed sociopolitical system that allows the drug trafficking industry to operate with impunity.

The fact that photographs of violence are prized commodities in a global image economy problematizes even further the representation of places of conflict.[146] The

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[144] The literature on the crisis at the Mexican-American border is extensive. For proficient introductions written in English to that historical moment, see Ricardo Ainslie, *The Fight to Save Juárez: Life in the Heart of Mexico's Drug War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013); and Alfredo Corchado, *Midnight in Mexico: A Reporter's Journey through a Country's Descent into the Darkness* (New York: Penguin, 2013).
[145] I do not deny that violence is an important part of everyday life in Juárez, but I am purposefully avoiding the reductive framework of using facts and figures to shock the reader. I am also mindful of the risk of using durational terms such as 'climax' in relation to the conflict, since it is ongoing and with no proper end in sight. While the violence diminished after 2012, it has risen dramatically again over the last two years, making 2018 the most violent year in Mexico's modern history. Ciara Nugent, "Mexico Is Suffering Its Bloodiest Year in Modern History. Here's Why," *Time*, June 28, 2018, https://time.com/5324888/mexico-violence-murders/.
[146] For an alternative platform that seeks to represent places of conflict with dignity, emphasizing the complexity and diversity of everyday life see the website founded by the photojournalists Peter DiCampo and Elie Gardner, *The Everyday Projects*, https://www.everydayprojects.org/.

media needs shocking images that generate traffic, while image professionals need to monetize their work by selling it to as many outlets as possible.[147] It is a vicious cycle sustained by a disposition for certain forms and contents that not only stimulate the public's expectation for increasingly gruesome images, but that also constricts their tolerance for non-tragic stories that originate from those same locations. Over time, these cycles define a mental picture of a place and its people that limits the values and possibilities that the public associates with it. In effect, it reduces entire cities to arenas of misfortune. The fluid circulation of images of violence through different media platforms exacerbates the problem, as they often lose the paratextual elements that properly contextualized them. This process, in which images mutate from vessels of information into quasi-autonomous objects for aesthetic contemplation, ends up unintentionally contributing to the formation of stereotypes in the collective unconscious.

The novelist Chimamanda Adichie has termed the repetition of narratives that flatten the specificities of cultural perception as "the danger of the single story."[148] In the case of Juárez, the fallacy is to believe that the war on drugs is the only subject worthy of depiction. Works that represent the north of Mexico, such as Jérôme Sessini's book *The Wrong Side: Living on the Mexican Border* (2012), are rarely interested in exploring its unique cultural dynamics. While the book is an important contribution to the documentation of the war on drugs, Sessini does not make a distinction between the *narco* conflict, the drug consumption epidemic, and a general conception of everyday life at the border. The images disregard the middle classes that constitute the bulk of the population and concentrate instead on a handful of *colonias* in the outskirts populated by people living on the fringes of a deeply unjust society.

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[147] For an investigation on the distribution of the news, see Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, *Image Brokers: Visualizing World News in the Age of Digital Circulation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).
[148] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," *TED video*, filmed July 2009, 18:49, www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/.

Sessini's narrow focus, in which these areas stand as a metonym for Juárez (or even worse, the whole Mexican border), is therefore potentially misleading, both aesthetically and politically.[149]

The way the images look also reinforces Sessini's partial view of Juárez. Whereas the bright light of the desert yields an intense contrast and saturation of colors, Sessini's use of faded tones seems eager to underscore the grimness of it all. The clearest example is the picture on the book's cover: a small girl faces the camera, standing in the middle of the street, wearing a Halloween mask, whose hollow eyes echo the openings of the unfinished social housing behind her [fig. 20]. Sessini uses the mask to suggest a heavy-handed metaphor for how violence and fear have put a new face on society, to the point of corrupting even its youngest members. However, the girl is too young to be aware of the consequences of wearing the mask in terms of her self-representation, and also in relation to the conflict shaping the city where she lives. That the mask can only have a negative political inflection on our reading of the photograph is indicative of Sessini's *a priori* judgment of the girl's future. His decision to treat her as a visual metaphor can be read as a form of emotional manipulation that is designed to control the viewer's responses.

Susan Sontag, highly aware of the risks of aestheticising images of conflict, has argued that "people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity or mere contrivance."[150] Sontag did not seek to remove questions of style from images of violence and conflict, but to raise awareness of their inner workings so that we can better calibrate our judgments. While Sessini's style is not particularly warm towards any of the subjects he tackles, some of his other work

[149] While the bulk of Sessini's book was shot in Juárez, it includes photographs from four other cities. The series appears on Magnum's website under the more accurate title *The Wrong Side: Drug-Related Violence in Mexico*. https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/jerome-sessini-the-wrong-side.
[150] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), 23.

reveals that he is capable of communicating a more empathetic view.[151] A more balanced representation of Juárez is Sessini's image of a young man standing on the ledge of a balcony, distractedly supervising the little children playing in front of him with their dogs [fig. 21]. The signs of poverty are clear, but the destitution of the children is not exploited for emotional gain. On the contrary, the domestic scene shows how seemingly insignificant moments like this can also provide insightful social commentary, particularly when they provide details about the living conditions of their subjects. While the emphasis of the photograph lies on the activities performed by the young triad, the numerous bars on windows, doors and terraces around them serve to remind us of the security people in that neighborhood feel is necessary.

Significant experience happens in all kinds of spaces, and a great deal is lost when artists, photojournalists and the media adhere to the idea that documentation should be restricted to the violent aspects of a conflict. Recording everyday life in a place like Juárez is crucial, precisely because it is unclear when, or if, the conflict will stop. Sessini defines the lives of those living on the Mexican side of the border, one of the most populated places in the world, as "a long expiatory calvary, for having committed the sin of being born in the wrong place at the wrong time."[152] This observation is not only deeply condescending towards Mexico, it also simplifies the cultural processes that have resulted from the historical struggle between Mexico and the USA. More importantly, Sessini's narrow focus overlooks the trademark hybridity of life at the border, with many going back and forth legally between Juárez and El Paso on a daily basis.

Even 'practical' photographs that aspire to a neutrality devoid of the weight of personal vison can end up making certain subjects invisible. The novelist and critic

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[151] See for instance *A Forgotten France* (2016), Sessini's series on his hometown of Les Vosges. https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/politics/forgotten-france/.
[152] Jérôme Sessini, *The Wrong Side: Living on the Mexican Border* (Roma: Contrasto, 2013), 157.

Teju Cole has observed that in photojournalism words and images certify each other's claims, and that this can conceal the biases of both mediums.[153] A recent news item in *El Diario de Juárez* describes the following incident:

> A 14-year-old was shot while eating *gorditas* in a stall at the Pedro Rosales de León Avenue, about 50 meters west of the Valentín Fuentes Avenue. He was hit in the thorax and taken to the hospital as a "code red." The zone was cordoned off by ministerial agents and the municipal police, who carried out an operation to locate the person responsible, unsuccessfully.[154]

In the accompanying photograph, the two police trucks flanking the parking lot's entrance are the only evidence of the hit and run, and yet, the image contains many features that are typical of Juárez: a cloudless blue sky, uneven sidewalks, a mini-mall full of badly designed banners, a humble food stall and low-rise buildings extending as far as the eye can see [fig. 22]. Each of these elements is a legitimate subject of study in its own right, whether pictorially or otherwise, but the combination of text and picture seems to take all of this for granted.[155] Because emptiness is ambiguous, it has become a cliché to invoke Walter Benjamin's observation that the unpeopled street scenes in Eugène Atget's pictures look like crime scenes.[156] Benjamin was strongly opposed to the indeterminacy of pictures, and his commentary was mainly a criticism of the untamable power of the uncaptioned image.[157] In his view, captions discouraged the "free-floating contemplation" of images, whereas they needed to be mobilized towards revolutionary

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153 Teju Cole, *Known and Strange Things* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016), 212.
154 *El Diario de Juárez*, "Balean a menor en puesto de gorditas," February 21, 2017. http://diario.mx/Local/2017-02-21_07edea9e/balean-a-menor-en-puesto-de-gorditas/. My translation. I edited the text for brevity.
155 For instance, Catherine Opie's series *Mini-malls* (1997-98), which questions how the architectural form of these places is related to their social and economic functions.
156 "[I]n its place the caption needs to install itself, which implicates photography in the literarization of all the conditions of life and without which all photographic construction is stalled in vagueness. *Not for nothing have Atget's shots been compared with those of a crime scene.* But is not every spot of our cities a crime scene?" Walter Benjamin, *On Photography*, ed., trans. Esther Leslie (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 93.
157 "Isn't inscription bound to become the most essential component of the photograph?" Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility, And Other Writings on Media*, ed., trans. Michael W. Jennings, et al. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 295.

actions.[158] However, it is only in forensic photography that emptiness serves the practical purpose of facilitating elements as evidence: a categorical association between emptiness and criminality is as limiting as it is illogical. In Juárez, as in many other places, it can be difficult to distinguish an ordinary empty street from that of a crime scene. Most of the time, it is the presence of spectators and police cars which signal the occurrence of a crime.

In contrast to Benjamin's instrumentalization of captions, the cultural critic Susie Linfield supports the ambiguity of reportage, arguing that it "allows us to feel things we don't quite understand," and that this permits us reevaluate what we think we know about unfamiliar places. Linfield reveals that a "quiet photograph" of two schoolboys in Baghdad hugging each other "moved, intrigued and humbled" her more than any other image of the Iraq war.[159] "In approaching photographs with relentless suspicion," she continues, "critics have made it easy for us to deconstruct images but almost impossible to see them; they have crippled our capacity to grasp… 'the *thereness* of the world.'"[160] The images that Linfield refers to were not made for the purpose of denouncing war, but are intent on showing the dignity of everyday life during times of conflict.

The journalist Alice Driver had a similar purpose when conducting field work in Juárez. Driver recognized that an emotional sensibility pertaining to everyday life needed to be traversed in order to understand the particularities of the conflict. "I asked people for their scar stories, but I also searched for them in territories, looked for the geography of trauma, *the city in which physical and economic violence etched itself into the cityscape*."[161] While some may find it dull, or even suspect, to record aspects of

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[158] Ibid., 27.
[159] Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 28-9.
[160] Ibid., 30.
[161] Alice Driver, *More or Less Dead: Feminicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2015), xiv. My emphasis.

a city beyond those affected by violence, Driver understood the importance of including a variety of sites, voices and experiences. Amongst these is the interview she conducted with Julián Cardona, a local photojournalist who has documented the rise of violence in Juárez since the 90's, but who has become skeptical that images can capture the sociopolitical complexities affecting the border. As powerful as his images are, Cardona realized that they could not record the underlying motives that cause the violence.[162] The government corruption that allows the drug trafficking industry to operate is as invisible as it is pervasive. His disillusionment prompted him to apply his observational skills to the quotidian side of the conflict.

In his series *Stardust: Memories of the Calle Mariscal* (2007-12), Cardona documents the former red-light district of Juárez, capturing how the severe diminution of public life during the conflict's climax led to problematic processes of urban renewal [fig. 23]. Contractors, with the aid of the local government, were quick in devising plans for the redevelopment of the area, which led to an inevitable process of gentrification.[163] While this made the city center safer and increased the foot traffic, it also resulted in the loss of the club culture that made Juárez famous[164]. Cardona's move towards a spatial study of the everyday can therefore be seen as confirming Linfield's view that, rather than merely shocking the viewer, photographs matter when they provide an "emotional connection to the world."[165]

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[162] Ibid., 29. Cardona collaborated with the writer Charles Bowden in what became the first American publication to cover the femicide phenomenon. The book also showed that the drug cartels are only one aspect of a neoliberal cataclysm that includes mass migration, automation and environmental contamination. See Charles Bowden, et al, *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our* Future (New York: Aperture, 1998).

[163] The iconic *calle* Mariscal and its surroundings were home to a club culture that was representative of Juárez. The golden age of these clubs, from the 30's to the 60's, is an important part of city's history and a source of pride. The singer Juan Gabriel, one of Mexico's biggest pop stars and the city's prodigal son, started his career in the club *El Noa Noa* in the 70's. Juan Gabriel is particularly admired in Juárez because he championed northern culture, extolling the qualities of *Juarenses* in many of his songs.

[164] The small catalogue published on occasion of the exhibition held at the Rubin Center for the Visual Arts contains snippets of fascinating interviews with people that lived, worked, or frequented the bars, clubs, and brothels in La Mariscal. See Julián Cardona, *Stardust: Memories of the Calle Mariscal* (El Paso: Rubin Center for the Visual Arts), 2014.

[165] Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance*, 22.

Alternative depictions of ordinary life in Juárez can also be found, perhaps unexpectedly, in sequential art, such as comics. Looking at social conflicts as a series of drawn vignettes has a strangely distancing effect. Comics, especially if they are monochromatic, assuage the distressing qualities of violent images, as readers are more aware of the symbolic use of violence than when they see similar images in the news. This is partly because of the way that words inform the images, making them less exploitative by contextualizing their potential ambiguity.

In books like Jon Sack's *La Lucha* (2015), a biographical account of the women's rights activist Lucha Castro, every element in the illustrations carries a pointed political inflection. As a consequence, the urban landscapes do not simply provide a stage for the actions but contain sociopolitical markers that reflect the nature of the conflict that engulfs the characters [fig. 24]. The streets of Juárez are rendered as a place of resistance and commemoration, where Castro and other activists lead peaceful demonstrations and leave their messages in strategic places.

For their book *Viva la Vida* (2011), the French illustrators Edmond Baudoin and Jean-Marc Troubet decided to visit the "border of borders" after reading *2666* (2004), Roberto Bolaño's novel about the city's femicides in a fictional version of Juárez named Santa Teresa.[166] The duo approached people on the streets and asked them to tell their dreams in exchange for a portrait. By "looking for life in a place of death," Baudoin and Troubet captured the intimate opinions of people that are typically left out of narratives of violence. [167] Their narrative describes what living in Juárez *feels* like through the eyes of the people that live there [fig. 25]. Some of the people they portray are not dissimilar to those in Sessini's photographs, and yet the illustrators managed to awaken a deeper sense of empathy. The sensitivity of their method led to encounters that confound our

[166] Edmond Baudoin and Jean-Marc Troubet, *Viva la Vida: Los sueños en Ciudad Juárez* (Mexico City: Sexto Piso, 2011), 27. My translation.
[167] Ibid., 33. My translation.

expectations, such as when the poet Miguel Ángel Chávez tells them he has wonderful childhood memories despite growing up in a dangerous *barrio*.[168] In the book's epilogue, the illustrators reflect on the psychological burden of being constantly exposed to a combination of extreme violence and corruption, and concede that their attempt to make sense of this conflict did not bring them the fulfillment they had hoped for.

These two comics make evident that there is a hierarchy of subject matter in works about Juárez, which has affected how the city has been inscribed in the collective unconscious. Everyday life, past and present, is at the bottom of the representational ladder, and it normally only figures if the events depicted intersect with criminal issues. As a result, Juárez has been fixed in its circumstance of disaster, with aspects of its history potentially lost forever. It is painful to see a place you care about being constantly reduced to its lowest common denominator. In the film *Sicario* (dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2015), the unpredictability and danger of Juárez is relayed in a tense sequence in which a guarded convoy transporting a cartel leader for extradition makes its way across the city [fig. 26]. To reveal the level of barbaric violence for which the city has become known, the sequence shows several bodies hanging from a bridge, followed by a character cynically murmuring to the protagonist – and to the audience – "Welcome to Juárez."[169] The inflection of these words, combined with the brutal images of the corpses, naturalizes the conflation between place and horror.

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[168] Ibid., 109. Elsewhere, Miguel Ángel Chávez tells the story of a Portuguese journalist that wanted to interview him. Chávez soon realized that the journalist had written his reports without leaving his hotel. He agreed to the interview under the condition that they go out on a tour of the city. Chávez takes him to a variety of neighborhoods, showing him how the population was keeping Juárez alive in spite of the many dangers. See Alejandro Páez Varela, ed. *La Guerra por Juárez*, 2nd ed. (Ciudad de México: Temas de Hoy, 2009), 131-2.

[169] It was disappointing to learn that the convoy scene, with the exception of the aerial-view cutaways, was filmed on the outskirts of Mexico City. I am aware that supplanting locations is a standard filmmaking practice, and yet, I was deeply troubled that none of the spaces used to illustrate the horrors of Juárez were real. The production even built a replica of one of the international bridges to film the bloody shootout that brings that sequence to an end.

I was born in Juárez, and while I have never lived in the city, I grew up listening to my father's stories about his childhood and youth there, before he moved to Mexico City to study law. His recollections have always fascinated me, but it was only after years of consuming cultural products like *Sicario* and seeing Juárez assailed in the news, that I felt the need to contribute to the imagery of my hometown. I recognized that my father's stories presented a challenge to the tired tropes detailed above. When taken outside the context of our familial history, his stories are representative of Mexico's 'perfect dictatorship,' the era before the globalizing forces of NAFTA altered Juárez in every conceivable way.[170] Taking as my cue Edward Soja's remark that "biographies are as much geographies as they are histories," I have shaped my father's memories into micro-narratives, and paired them with my photographs of the public places where those events unfolded.[171] The resulting work, *Border Documents*, comprises a modest comedy of manners that offers a personal perspective on Juárez during the first three decades of my father's life, adopting a Benjaminian approach to the "theater of the past."[172]

I see my father's memories as an opportunity to discuss significant aspects of everyday life in the border that are seldom talked about. The texts have a spatial focus that reveals how the urban landscape is a primary stage for many of our affects. However, not every text in the book is paired with an image. Some spreads isolate one of the two modes of communication to emphasize the disparities between them: not everything can be depicted, and some memories cannot be articulated. The biggest absence, of course, is that of the conflict itself, and the project questions what it means to concentrate on personal sites of memory. As Rancière has pointed out, the

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[170] This influential term was coined in 1990 by the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa. It cleverly synthesizes the contradictory peculiarities of the political party that ruled Mexico without interruption from 1929 to 2000.
[171] Edward Soja "Taking Space Personally," in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Barney Warf and Santa Arias (New York: Routledge, 2009), 12.
[172] "Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater." Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: Part 2*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, et al. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 611.

representation of conflict "is a matter of *sensitivity* to the configuration of a space and to the specific rhythm of a time, a matter of experiencing the *intensities* that space and that time bring."[173] In this case, I want the viewer-reader to experience time with double the intensity, inviting them to question the gaps, omissions and uncertainties between what is depicted in the photographs and what is described in the texts.

I worked with my father over a period of four years, trying to capture his unique voice, condensing his expansive recollections, and translating them into English. Collaborating with him was a challenging process. It required him to either retell the stories several times or to write them down, which would result in long passages that digressed in all sorts of directions. What he recounted verbally with casualness and wit would change register as soon as he put it in writing. Our exchanges often reminded me of some of the difficulties that Larry Sultan encountered while collaborating with his father for his series *Pictures from Home*.[174] Sultan's father felt that the portraits of him were more a reflection of his son than of him: representation is a problem that we all have to contend with, regardless of how close the subject is to our hearts.

I intend this work be a play of subjectivities, involving my father's, my own and those of the viewer. I strived to find a register that did not sentimentalize his recollections, while treating them with the dignity and importance they deserve. A similar measure was taken by Perec in his text *The Rue Vilin* (1977), a description of the Parisian street where he lived as a child before the death of his parents. Perec followed the redevelopment of the street over a five-year period:

> At No. 24 (this is the house where I lived): First, a single-storey building with, on the ground floor, a doorway (blocked up); all around, still traces of paintwork and above, not yet completely rubbed

[173] Jacques Rancière, "Theater of Images" in Alfredo Jaar, *La Politique des Images*, (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2007), 80. My emphasis.
[174] Larry Sultan, *Pictures from Home*, new ed. (London: Mack, 2017), 159-160.

> away the inscription LADIES' HAIRDRESSER. Then a low building with a doorway giving on to a long paved courtyard on several different levels (flights of two or three steps). On the right, a long single-storey building (giving in the old days on to the street through the blocked-up doorway to the hairdressing salon) with a double flight of concrete steps leading up to it (this is the building we lived in; the hairdressing salon was my mother's).[175]

This brief paragraph shows how dispassionate observations can be transformed by a modest hint of emotion. Perec is able to describe his emotional ties to the street while circumventing the sensationalism of his orphanhood.[176] It is precisely the sparsity of the treatment that gives the text a feeling of authenticity, perhaps more so than if he had described his feelings in great detail. Perec adopted this 'flat affect' again in the book *I Remember* (1978), which consists of brief and unpretentious passages that encapsulate a personal view of the cultural landscape of post-war France. His work offers a relatable model of biography that brings together the personal, the social, and the historical. Despite the cultural specificity of many passages, or perhaps because of it, our curiosity is awakened, and we want to know more about the objects, places or events described. The central idea behind the book is that no memory is inconsequential, however simple it may seem – one entry simply reads "I remember the old Montparnasse station" – or so convoluted that it cannot fit into a paragraph:

> I remember that at the bottom of the footbridge near the top of Rue du Ranelagh that crossed the Ceinture railroad line and led to the Bois de Boulogne, there was a little shack which served as a shoemaker's workshop, and that, after the war, it was covered in

[175] Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 214.
[176] Whereas in clinical psychology flat affect describes a lack of emotional expression, in an art context the same term is used to describe a deadpan view or a pared-down style that achieves resonance through emotional restraint. See for instance Jackie Stacey, "Crossing over with Tilda Swinton—the Mistress of 'Flat Affect'", *International Journal of Politics Culture and Society* (2015) 28: 243-271.

> swastikas because the shoemaker had been a collaborator, or so people said.[177]

Fraught subjects, such as Nazi collaboration, can sometimes appear to be exceptions disassociated from everyday life. Here, given the text's brevity, Perec's remarkably detailed description of the location accomplishes the double purpose of helping us visualize the shed more vividly, while making us consider the social divisions that came after the end of the war. The text connects place and feeling, memory and narrative, and even suggests that history is not as prescriptive as it seems. There is a similar sense of playfulness in John Cage's *Indeterminacy* (1959), whose texts manage, like some photographs, to examine moments that would otherwise have been glossed over:

> Once I was visiting my Aunt Marge. She was doing her laundry. She turned to me and said, 'You know? I love this machine much more than I do your Uncle Walter.'[178]

Like a sculptural readymade, this brief text captures a remarkable emotional exchange between two people, exposing how the tedium of a long marriage is exposed in banal situations. The comment implies a closeness between Cage and his aunt. But is her revelation a reflection of the couple's strained relationship, or was it made sarcastically? The power of the text lies in its sense of humor and calculated lack of resolution. Cage gives his readers ample room to project their own thoughts and feelings onto the situation.

In terms of structure, the condensed exchanges in *Indeterminacy* reject any kind of taxonomy, in accordance with Cage's interest in chance and the interconnectedness

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[177] Georges Perec, *I Remember* (Boston: David R. Godine, 2014), 86; 46. The book's format was inspired by Joe Brainard's similarly titled *I Remember* (1970).
[178] John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 85.

of things.[179] A similar commitment to randomness is found in Perec's book, where the lack of organizational pattern emulates the swiftness of remembrances, as if he had written them down at the pace dictated by memory. In contrast, the stories in *Border Documents* are sequenced chronologically to allow a new kind of document to emerge, one that brings together testimony and visual facts. By facts I mean those incontrovertible elements that can be read at face value, and that yet give way to a multitude of interpretations. This idea is captured in Garry Winogrand's famous observation that "there is nothing as mysterious as a fact clearly described."[180]

The project plays with the notion of the transparency of the deadpan documentary image, and its impact on memory. Siegfried Kracauer claimed that photographs were not as effective as memories in preserving the richness of a moment, because, despite the precision of their detail, they contain only a finite amount of information. Memories, conversely, increase their reach and semiotic value over time.[181] Kracauer thought photographs merely confirmed our recollections, as if their concreteness made them redundant. The opposite argument has been made by the critic Janet Malcolm, who has stated that memory "glimmers and hints but shows nothing sharply."[182] This remark is particularly telling since she is referring to the difficulties of autobiographical writing. The question, therefore, is whether a photograph can provide facts to be used for a particular practice, and whether it can also be used as a point of departure for a more symbolic kind of use, one in which information is not reduced to evidence.

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[179] Ibid., 260.
[180] Garry Winogrand, "Understanding Still Photography" in *Gary Winogrand* (El Cajon: Grossmont College Gallery, 1976), unpaginated.
[181] Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 55.
[182] Janet Malcolm, *Forty-One False Starts: Essays on Artists and Writers* (London: Granta, 2013), 297.

Kracauer shared Benjamin's distrust of the autonomous image, also for political rather than aesthetic reasons, but the limitations of photography can be exploited for creative gain. I see the intersection of words and images in *Border Documents* as an opportunity to open up a dialogue between physical and mental space. My father's stories bring to the fore conflicts and desires that affirm the notion that an active reading of space has to be "completed through words."[183] The comprehension of a place ought to include more than its visible infrastructure, and one way to do that is by considering the testimony of its inhabitants. Understood in political terms, however, this dual presentation of content is also a way of resisting a totalitarian conception of history. The breaks in *Border Documents* are indicative of the ways in which we are constantly rewriting the past.

My hope is that the book will contribute to the discussion of the Mexican-American border, examining everyday life as a matrix that encompasses a wide range of registers. This approach is particularly necessary at the present moment in time, when the migrant caravans from Central America, NAFTA renegotiation, and the prospect of a harsher border wall have strained once again the bilateral relationship.

[183] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008), 63. For Augé, non-places are "like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (64).

VII. *A Certain Logic of Expectations*

The second series I produced for my practice-based research project is a multi-layered narrative that looks to broaden the terms of representation of the city of Oxford.[184] The aim of the photographs and texts that make up the series is threefold: to resist the visual authority of the architecture of the city center, to reflect on the current political moment of Brexit, and to consider the cultural implications that stand behind the enduring expression 'town and gown.'[185] By the term 'political' I do not mean to imply *realpolitik* or the discussion of partisan ideologies, but "the way we organize our social life together, and the power-relations which this involves."[186] Although a site of immense power and influence, Oxford is consistently referred to as a 'bubble' in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom. With this work, I want to challenge two contradictory tropes that have considerable traction: that Oxford is somehow beyond representation because of its familiarity and its relative prosperity, and that all cities are alike because the forces of capitalism have eroded cultural and geographical specificity.[187]

It is common practice to describe cities according to the qualities for which they are best known, with some critics believing that a city's spirit can be condensed to a singular ethos.[188] The trouble with this essentialist approach is that it can leave out

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[184] I borrowed the title from a performative lecture by the writer Adrian Rifkin at the Ruskin School of Art in 2015. For a transcript of the lecture see Adrian Rifkin, 'On Writing the Last Line First (One of Three Possible Titles),' *The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform*, Issue 0 (2016): 7-20.
[185] Buildings are representative of ideologies, and they exert an influence on the inhabitants of a city. See Charles T. Goodsell, *The Social Meaning of Civic Space: Studying Political Authority through Architecture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988).
[186] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 169.
[187] For instance, Boris Groys affirms that a "world city operates like a reproductive machine that relatively swiftly multiplies any local attribute of one particular city in all other cities around the world." Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 106. For an analysis that treats globalization as a phenomenon that produces a diversity of experiences which can make us revalorize our quotidian environment, see Chris Rumford *Cosmopolitan Spaces: Europe, Globalization, Theory* (London: Routledge, 2008).
[188] Daniel A. Bell and Avner De-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). The authors describe Oxford as a 'City of Learning,' and claim that this is "the first thing you think of when you hear the city's name" (161). The researchers do recognize that the 'learning' ethos does not apply to everyone in Oxford equally.

many aspects that are important to forming an opinion of a city. One of the purposes of my project is to show the potential for discussion and enjoyment of non-places that are usually overlooked in Oxford – many of which feature vernacular architecture – precisely because they fall outside the ethos of 'intellectualism' most people associate with the city. An important precedent in the analysis of the local urban landscape is James Stevens Curl's *The Erosion of Oxford* (1973), which considers the social and aesthetic consequences of modernization, foregrounding the worthiness of the ancient structures in the center as the main asset of the city.

The publication is not an artistic proposition, but a well-intentioned attempt to raise awareness about the negative aspects of the type of hyper-rational planning that razed the historical quarter of St Ebbe's without delivering satisfactory results. As an impassioned defender of classical architecture, Curl questions the rejection of tradition by postmodernist architects, planners, and designers, whose visions, he believes, yield a dehumanizing environment. "Oxford is no longer a visual or cohesive entity," Stevens Curl asserts. "It straggles, it sprawls, it has lost its *form*."[189] But while he is adept at describing how beautiful buildings are conduits of moral values that have a positive psychological impact on individuals, he has little patience for places outside the city center like Rose Hill or Blackbird Leys, which he describes as "areas of unmitigated ugliness and banality."[190]

My book is not a critique of architecture or planning, but a narrative take on Oxford based on my own experience of the city, loosely structured around thematic strands that explore the notions of home and homelessness, the looming presence of Brexit on everyday life, the conflicted local economy, and the urban diversity of the

[189] James Stevens Curl, *The Erosion of Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1977), 164. Emphasis in original.
[190] Ibid., 164. Curl believes that "the spiritual emptiness of much of what is being done to Oxford's physical fabric is born of expediency." (203)

city's neighborhoods.[191] A set of rectangular pictures made outside the city center constitute the bulk of the series, with some square photographs depicting places that are part of the University interspersed throughout the book. Of the latter, I only included places that communicated a symbolic sense of exclusion or that disturbed the impression of material permanence and cultural stability that old buildings convey. I was not interested in assembling an archive of visually stunning spaces connected to the University, of which there are many already in existence.[192] Together, the two kinds of images establish a visual dialogue that bridges a variety of social environments, challenging the standard dichotomy of either denouncing Oxford's social ills or celebrating its obvious charms.

Photographing a city as widely documented as Oxford is a challenge precisely because its ethos aligns so well with its prominent architecture. As a consequence, most publications capture a limited number of urban sights, giving way to a paradox in which an increase of representations limits the diversity of content. When a particular kind of picture is replicated time and again, it perpetuates expectations that can potentially restrict the imagination and desires of the viewers. This creates an image environment that – be it for economic or creative reasons – further limits the possibility of future representations that go against the grain.

A recent high-profile addition to this ever-expanding collection of clichés is Martin Parr's *Oxford* (2017). Like most depictions of the city, it focuses exclusively on its ancient University, documenting the academic and social activities around the colleges.[193] Parr is known for presenting human frailty as social satire, often taking a

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[191] While I did not divide my book into chapters, I took inspiration from Erich Mendelsohn's *Amerika*, in which images are grouped following a subjective taxonomy, with section bearing titles such as *Typically American Traits* or *The Gigantic, The Grotesque, The New*. See Erich Mendelsohn, *Amerika: 82 Photographs* (New York: Dover, 1993).
[192] For a more original contribution to the representation of the University of Oxford, see Joanna Vestey, *Custodians* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum/Wigwam Books, 2015).
[193] Martin Parr, *Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

city or a country as a point of departure.[194] In this series, he captures the quads, garbs, ceremonies, and parties that have long captivated people, especially outsiders [fig. 27]. While these eccentric customs are indeed fascinating, the issue is whether Parr perpetuates the antagonistic split of 'town and gown' by conflating the city with the institution.[195] In emphasizing the 'comedy of manners' that has become his trademark discourse, Parr belabors the privilege and entitlement of some undergraduate students, while sidelining the rest of the city, as if the people and neighborhoods outside of the center did not contribute anything to Oxford's public life. This narrow view establishes a misleading context for the social dynamics of the city. If the aim of the book were only to concentrate on the institution, then perhaps a different title would have been more apt.[196]

In contrast, the pictures in *A Certain Logic of Expectations* try to open up the city, offering the viewer/reader a multitude of conceptual entry points to consider its peculiarities, including, but not limited to, its infamous social divide. I believe there is artistic value in documenting these peculiarities, thinking of buildings, streets, and their related objects not only as significant sources of sociological information but as an environment that defines who we are in aesthetic and psychological terms.[197]

I had a critical realization while watching the documentary *The Social Life of Small Public Spaces* (1980), in which the urbanist William H. Whyte surveys public squares in Manhattan to see how they influence patterns of behavior.[198] He noted, for

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[194] Some examples are Martin Parr, *The Last Resort: Photographs of New Brighton* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis, 1998); Martin Parr, *Mexico* (New York: Aperture, 2006); Martin Parr, *Tutta Roma* (Rome: Contrasto, 2006) amongst others.
[195] For a damning critique of Parr's practice, see Stephen Dawber, "Martin Parr's Suburban Vision," *Third Text* (2004) 18: 251-262.
[196] Parr's book is not even a comprehensive 'portrait' of the University of Oxford, as many colleges denied him access to their grounds, fearful of his scornful eye.
[197] For an urban analysis that considers the behavioral implications of planning, see Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (London: Faber & Faber,1996). Of interest here is how cities need anarchism in order to work, and not just beautiful architecture and a functioning infrastructure.
[198] *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, directed by William H. Whyte (1979; USA: Direct Cinema Limited, 2005), DVD.

instance, that people alter their conduct and movement depending on a multitude of minor factors such as the direction and availability of light, the accessibility of seating, the level of noise, the degree of human activity, and so forth. The film is a lesson in how to interpret the seemingly banal interactions that take place in an urban environment, and how to extrapolate psychological and sociopolitical conclusions from them.

Walking is another a productive method to understand the cultural dynamic of a city.[199] Getting feedback from the streets was an activity adopted by the experimental group the Situationists in the late 1950s. They devised several strategies to break away from the tacit impositions that determine how we engage with the city since our routines are primarily determined by social conventions such as our work schedules and consumption habits. The most important of these conceptual strategies was the *dérive*, which proposed psychogeographical navigation of urban space that favored contingency to increase our range of experiences.[200] The most significant benefit of the *dérive* is that we can attain a new awareness of space for free and without traveling far. The concept promises exciting or unexpected experiences if people allow themselves to drift. As the critic Lori Waxman has pointed out, being receptive "to the things that are left behind, that behave against their nature, that are highly circumstantial, is partly a matter of attitude and partly a matter of going on foot."[201] *Dérives* allow us to gather observations that speak of the present and how its conditions affect us, not to formulate timeless conclusions about the city.[202]

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[199] Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking* (London: Verso, 2014). Gros is mostly interested in walking in the countryside and dedicates scant reflections to the urban stroll.
[200] Guy Debord, the leader of the Situationists, wrote that psychogeography "will aim to study the precise laws and specific effects of the geographic milieu, consciously planned or not, acting directly on the affective comportment of individuals." As an adjective, Debord adds, the term applies to "the data ascertained through this type of investigation, to the effects of their influence on human feelings and… to any conduct that seems to arise from the same spirit of discovery." Tom McDonough, ed., *The Situationists and the City* (London: Verso, 2009), 59.
[201] Lori Waxman, *Keep Walking Intently: The Ambulatory Art of the Surrealists, the Situationist International, and Fluxus* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 181.
[202] Ibid., 141.

I embraced the concept of the *dérive* as an essential part of my practice to get a more profound understanding of Oxford's particularities.[203] Since it is a small city with plenty of signage, it is difficult to get lost with the kind of resolve and intensity once conveyed by Walter Benjamin.[204] The terrain is easy to navigate – I came across an unpaved street once in four years of photographing – and it is safe to walk alone with a camera in hand, a major impediment for carrying out similar projects elsewhere. Again, because of its dimensions, Oxford presents an urban landscape with limited variations, which increases the level of difficulty in making thought-provoking photographs.

The Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa describes walking as a form of identifying oneself with a place: "Walking on these streets, until the night falls, my life feels to me like the life they have… There is no difference between me and these streets, save they being streets and I a soul, which perhaps is irrelevant when we consider the essence of things."[205] Through his alter-ego Bernardo Soares, Pessoa seems to have wanted to function as a transceiver for the city's intensities, taking the streets as sites where we are attuned with our emotions but can also feed on those of others. Whereas *Border Documents* was conceptualized in advance, this series developed organically in response to the environment. I consider the ordinary places depicted in this series to be a register of the city's pulsations, emphasizing the notion that images carry relational and emotional values.[206]

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[203] See Karen O'Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016). O'Rourke emphasizes the use of new technologies for mapping in conjunction with participatory art, but photography as a practice is absent, except as a documentation tool.
[204] "Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling." Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 53.
[205] Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. Richard Zenith. (London: Penguin, 2002), 2.
[206] My original intention was to bring in a multitude of viewpoints and stories. To this end, I circulated a questionnaire amongst colleagues, friends and acquaintances, asking them about their opinions and experiences of the city. Most of the responses I got were disappointing. They were either lazy, cliched or disinterested. I became frustrated by how psychologically and/or politically guarded people were in revealing their feelings towards Oxford. As a result, I decided to focus on my own experiences.

My only self-imposed rule was to photograph within the city's boundaries. I took guidance from other photographic series that perform poetic mapping of cities to create counter-narratives that excludes their landmarks, such as Mark Power's *26 Different Endings*, which documents sites that stand just outside of the pages of the *A-Z London Street Atlas* [fig. 28]. These places, at the interstice between the urban and suburban, are part of London but do not usually figure in customary representational outlets like travel books, postcards, or tv shows.[207] Similarly, I tried to incorporate pictures of as many different areas of Oxford as possible, but without the programmatic impetus of Power's book. I resolved only to use images that functioned visually and symbolically, rather than comprehensively to include all of the city's areas.

Another project that helped me define a visual style for the series was John Gossage's *The Thirty-Two Inch Ruler* (2010), where he documented the area of Kalorama in Washington, D.C. His affluent neighborhood houses high-profile politicians, and is near embassies, national agencies, and the White House. The photographs themselves reveal very little of this charged political environment and consist mostly of suburban scenes and architectural details [fig. 29]. The pictures, gathered over several years, rely on a brief introduction to make evident Gossage's connection to the place and their symbolic context and content:

> I started to think about these pictures on September 12th, the day I first became aware that Donald Rumsfeld was my neighbor. [...] I slowly became aware that it was important that I photograph here. I thought I might try to work on the drift of privilege, and the numbness and dislocation it engenders. [...] A place of beauty and calm that you might choose to live in, if you could. A place that makes visual the affectations of wealth and political power. [...] Washington

[207] Mark Power, *26 Different Endings* (Brighton: Photoworks, 2007).

> is a city that, in its most famous aspects, is profoundly non-visual. What you see is not what you get.[208]

As the critic Gerry Badger has noted, Gossage "cannot document power and the geopolitical game directly; he can only suggest that we look at this imagery and think."[209] Indeed, the image sequence does not feature people or overt signs that are representative of the political influence of the capital. The book's vagueness becomes indicative of how unassuming places can be laden with values and emotions that are inaccessible without a textual component. What moves the sequence forward is the consistency of the content (windows, porches, cars, trees), the color palette, and the vertical orientation of the pictures. Gossage has aptly stated that "most photographic projects do not resolve" but offer "a framework in which a sensibility exists."[210]

Barthes, too, believed that the signs of a city were best communicated through a personal narrative. A semiology of the city "will require many of us to attempt to decipher the city where we are, beginning, if necessary, with a personal report."[211] For Barthes, the relation between urban signifiers and signifieds was transient, and we have to go beyond analyzing data and producing models to make sense of the city. In a similar vein, the novelist Rachel Cusk writes that "the only way to know something is to experience it," since "the truest forms of knowledge are personal."[212] Barthes' and Cusk's phenomenological approach is widely accepted in the domain of literature but tends to be more absent in documentary photography, since even in cases where words are used alongside images, they tend to be deployed in a manner that conveys

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[208] John Gossage, *The Thirty-Two Inch Ruler* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2010), 9.
[209] Gerry Badger, "John Gossage: The Thirty-Two Inch Ruler/Map of Babylon," *Aperture*, no. 198 (2010): 58.
[210] John Gossage interviewed by Jonathan Blaustein, *A Photo Editor*, September 23, 2013. http://aphotoeditor.com/2013/09/23/john-gossage-interview-part-1.
[211] Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 201. To his mind, only writers have produced multiple "readings of the city." Ibid.
[212] Rachel Cusk, *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), 73. Interestingly, Cusk fetishizes the "knowledge without risk" of the voyeur, who can assess at will and with more freedom than the writer (73).

'objective' information. The desire to record personal impressions, opinions, and feelings for the city necessarily involves thinking of everyday life as a significant category of human experience.

If we accept that personal experiences can be the raw material for an artwork, the challenge becomes that of delimiting its content and deciding on a framework. Sarah Manguso, who is noted for her autobiographical prose, had to deal with an extreme version of such a problem. She kept a diary for twenty-five years, obsessively recording everything that happened to her. Manguso describes her effort to be as comprehensive as possible, using a straightforward style to achieve a more transparent record of her emotions: "The goal being a form no one notices, the creation of what seems like pure feeling, not of what seems like a vehicle for a feeling. Language as pure experience, pure memory. I too wanted to achieve that impossible effect."[213]

The idea that unobtrusive description is a more direct way to capture feelings echoes a conception of photography whose ambition is to show 'things as they are'.[214] A longstanding discussion in relation to the medium has been how to communicate those categories of experience that are excluded when showing documentary photographs, a particularly pressing issue when it comes to images of the urban landscape, which often come across as dry.[215] Words help us to access the emotional values generated by unremarkable places and experiences, and this complicates the relationship between

[213] Sarah Manguso, *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary* (London: Picador, 2019), 16. Manguso enters into a crisis when she cannot shape her diary for publication. Abandoning the project means also giving up on the idea that everything can be recorded.
[214] For a conventional, yet powerful, account of the virtues of 'straight' photography, see John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007). In the section "The Thing Itself," Szarkowski proposes that "more convincingly than any other kind of picture, a photograph evokes the tangible presence of reality. Its most fundamental use and its broadest acceptance has been as a substitute for the subject itself – a simpler, more permanent, more clearly visible version of the plain fact." (12)
[215] See Karen Beckman and Liliane Weissberg, eds., *On Writing with Photography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). Several of the essays gathered in the book debate the notion that photographs are insufficient to communicate a whole spectrum of experiences.

the surfaces of the material world – which photography captures – and the depths of personal history.

For me, it was imperative to find a register and tone for the texts in *A Certain Logic of Expectations* that felt appropriate in combination with the photographs. Both depictive systems needed to provide a false sense of narrative. What I mean by this is that neither the pictures nor the texts tell a conventional story, but their parallel existence is intended to make the viewers feel there is one. Following Manguso, I settled on a paired down style that could convey personal experience without an excess of emotion. This strategy also had the benefit of mirroring the deadpan aesthetic of the images. Something similar happens in the book *Nadja* (1928), where André Breton's medical training influenced the style of the text, which at points seems to emulate the factuality of a physician's report.[216] As the historian Ian Walker suggests, however, this does not mean we should take *Nadja* at face value but recognize how Breton's tactics give his account the appearance of reality. "The physical geography of Paris is replaced by an affective topography, superimposing a sort of *carte du tendre* over the actual city."[217]

The brevity of these texts was influenced by Walter Benjamin's ability to extract significance from small details and craft sophisticated fragments out of those observations. I did not want, however, to write in his elaborate style, which relies heavily on allegories and metaphors.[218] Nevertheless, the only fragment of *One-Way Street* that makes direct reference to the urban landscape happens to be slightly more accessible than the rest:

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[216] André Breton *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Penguin, 1999).
[217] Ian Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 53.
[218] Benjamin went as far as to state that "nothing is poorer than a truth expressed as it was thought. Committed to writing in such a case, it is not even a bad photograph." Given the comparison with photography, I interpret his comment as a rejection of simple language, believing it cannot lead to the expression of complex ideas. Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 83.

> A highly convoluted neighborhood, a network of streets that I had avoided for years, was disentangled at a single stroke when one day a person dear to me moved there. It was as if a searchlight set up at this person's window dissected the area with pencils of light.[219]

Here, Benjamin exhibits a sincerity that is crucial to psychogeographical documentations of streets, when an emotional reconsideration of a familiar place opens up interpretive possibilities.

Nathalie Sarraute's *Tropisms* engage even more openly with the realm of emotions through comparably short narratives, but with a syntax that is closer to prose poetry than to the personal essay.[220] For all the enjoyable playfulness and genre subversion of her stories, there is a self-indulgence in the use of language that makes them even more abstract than Benjamin's. Nevertheless, Sarraute's definition of the titular word closely approaches the kind of emotions I am interested in describing:

> Certain inner 'movements'… hidden under the commonplace, harmless appearances of every instant of our lives… of which we are hardly cognizant, slip through us on the frontiers of consciousness in the form of undefinable, extremely rapid sensations. They hide behind our gestures, beneath the words we speak and the feelings we manifest, all of which we are aware of experiencing, and are able to define. […] These movements seemed to me to be veritable dramatic actions, hiding beneath the most commonplace conversations, the most everyday gestures, and constantly emerging up to the surface of the appearances that both conceal and reveal them.[221]

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[219] Ibid., 52.
[220] Sarraute states that her book was "written under the impact of an emotion." Nathalie Sarraute, *Tropisms/The Age of Suspicion*, trans. Maria Jolas (London: John Calder, 1963), 7.
[221] Ibid., 7-8.

I deviate from Sarraute's opinion, in that most of the behaviors and actions I tried to describe from people I observed in the streets were not dramatic, although they did signal a change in mood that precipitated a remark or an adjustment in their body language. I tried to focus on instances that were caused by the environment, and whose significance would have been lost had I not recorded them.

I shied away from creating a fictional narrator that stood in as an alter-ego, as in Patrick Keiller's *London* (1994). His essay film is a brilliant visual investigation of the social uses of space based on a compendium of unexpected sights, but the artificiality of the narration that accompanies it – both in the script and in the performative delivery by the actor Paul Scofield – is highly demanding for an international audience. Between Scofield's stark voice and the specialized references, viewers are likely to feel lost unless they are already knowledgeable about British history and culture. Keiller's *London* – and the subsequent parts of the trilogy *Robinson in Space* (1997) and *Robinson in Ruins* (2010) – raise the question of determining one's audience in advance for a particular cultural product. Here the concept of authenticity comes again into play since I believe that the premise of creating a fictional character to voice the author's opinions of the city was executed in a forced manner that makes those opinions seem fabled as opposed to experiential. My foremost intention was for the texts in *A Certain Logic of Expectations* to be relatable, since many of the potential readers will have never experienced Oxford – or will only have done so casually – before engaging with the book. Therefore, the texts had to convey something about me as well as about the city.

Much more relevant for me is Keiller's account of how he came to photograph Kensal Green Cemetery.[222] The fall of a section of the cemetery's wall serves Keiller as

[222] Patrick Keiller, "Imagining" in *The View from the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes* (London: Verso, 2014).

an opportunity to recount his complicated relationship with London, offering a genealogy of personal experiences related to places where he has lived and worked over the years. He describes his feelings towards these places, emphasizing the role the urban landscape played in developing a political consciousness, and which eventually made him abandon his career in architecture for one in filmmaking.[223] This written essay feels less guarded than his films, as if Keiller felt free from the pressures of intellectual posturing and could finally disclose his motivations clearly, detailing how *dérives* can become material of great value for artistic practice.

Closer in spirit to my own project is the work of Moyra Davey. In her essays, Davey strikes a register that is both intellectual and confessional, constructing small passages that persuade the reader to connect a variety of themes, ranging from her biography and artistic practice to reflections on literature, criticism, and theory. In *Notes on Photography & Accident*, she ponders on the function of contingency in fine art photography, while also revealing details of her personal life, such as her diminishing production due to optic neuritis.[224] Davey admits suffering from the visual equivalent of 'writer's block', positing that a way of overcoming it is to make photographs that "take seed in words."[225] Once the written fragments begin to take shape, she resolves to "allow chance elements of [...] daily life" to "find their way into the essay."[226] The combination of these two ideas proved very productive for me: first, starting a project with the intention of texts influencing – or maybe even dictating – the photographic outcome, and second, the notion that life's eventualities will be a significant source for the textual content.

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[223] For instance, Keiller writes that Harrow Road "is a part of London I have come to associate with creative anxieties of one kind or another, some of them dating from the years immediately before and after 1979, when I was migrating unsteadily between careers..." Keiller, *The View from the Train*, 176.
[224] Moyra Davey, "Notes on Photography & Accident" in *Long Life, Cool White* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
[225] Ibid., 81.
[226] Ibid., 86.

Davey is very adept at explaining the feelings behind her creative process, most of which are not evident by just looking at the images. While Davey is a talented visual craftsman, the dense network of quotations and references in her essays enrich her production.[227] A case in point is a color photograph of her refrigerator. There is nothing unusual in the objects depicted, but the mix of warm tones and the way the boxes are arranged atop the refrigerator make it strangely captivating [fig. 30]. The transformation of the mundane, however, reaches a different level once we watch (or read) *Fifty Minutes* (2006), in which Davey recounts the anxiety generated by the process of consumption and replenishment of food in her fridge.[228] While *Fifty Minutes* is not primarily about the urban landscape – the overarching theme of the video is her ambivalence towards her many years of psychoanalysis – Davey often remarks on her relationship to places:

> Yet, if I have any feeling of nostalgia toward New York City, it is mapped through my trajectory to and from Dr. Y's office on the East Side. My daily travel was like a circle drawn around the heart of the city. The solidity and sometimes glamour of Manhattan became like the ballast, the reassuring counterweight for the muck that spewed forth in the confines of that small, decorous office.[229]

Although autobiographical texts have the potential drawback of seeming egocentric, since everything is seen from the author's perspective, they can also assist the reader/viewer to interpret the images related to them with the same candor as Davey's fridge. For me, the risk of including autobiographical details was worth taking insofar as it made my pursuit of authenticity more explicit. This is not to say that artworks are more prescient simply because they are made sincerely. It is the author's

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[227] It is important to note that Davey's texts are excluded in the exhibition of her images. The dynamic in which texts and images feed from each other only happens while going through the book.
[228] A transcript of the video is included in her publication *Long Life, Cool White*.
[229] Davey, *Long Life, Cool White*, 140-41.

task to create a framework that facilitates their reading as both information and as a reflection of his or her subjectivity.

The texts and images gathered in *A Certain Logic of Expectations* reveal my investment in the uses of social space while challenging the idea of authenticity as sentimental. The difficulty of 'opening up' in the pursuit of authenticity does not lie in revealing potentially embarrassing aspects of one's life, but in coming across as obvious or dull. "What the memoirist owes the reader," writes David Shields, "is the ability to persuade him or her that the narrator is trying, as honestly as possible, to get to the bottom of the experience at hand."[230] I have tried to hold on to Shield's view while making my standpoint, allegiances, preferences, and biases clear to the reader: this is a personal account from someone who is not native to the city, but who lived in Oxford for an extended period as a member of its ancient University.

Some reader-viewers may feel that the relation between the different modes of representation is too distant. If so, this is the result of a deliberate decision, for it is precisely this gap that I want them to traverse, prompting them to consider how these mediums influence each other. This intermedial disparity is comparable to the filmic technique of montage, where the editing of different image sequences creates a narrative promise that can remain open-ended or with an abstract resolution that does not add up. Rancière discusses this problem in relation to Jean-Luc Godard's essay films, describing them as 'sentence-images' that combine "two functions that are to be defined aesthetically – that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image."[231] Such a montage, as Rancière explains, can "do two things at once: organize a clash and construct a continuum."[232] In other words, the

[230] David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2011), 40.
[231] Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2009), 46.
[232] Ibid., 60. This clash involves "presenting the strangeness of the familiar, in order to reveal a different order of measurement that is only uncovered by the violence of a conflict." (57)

mediums intersect, but each retains enough autonomy to build a narrative. Similarly, the text-image relation in *A Certain Logic of Expectations* remains vague, random, and mysterious, so that the lack of causal links between them can spark unexpected revelations in the reader/viewer.

This paratactical relation between text and image is particularly important given that photographs of empty streets tend to lack discernible narratives, which makes them problematic to decipher in terms of authorial intent and emotional content. A paratext that accompanies an image of a street can lay bare the relationship people have with the place they inhabit. A city such as Oxford can make people think that the study of its glorious past – embodied in the colleges and in the plaques and monuments celebrating those that have been associated with the University throughout its nine hundred years of existence – is much more important than the analysis and documentation of its present. In W.G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* (2001), the main character describes his anxiety of knowing that most personal histories will end in oblivion: "the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on."[233] It is a great irony that this can happen in a city so thoroughly documented as Oxford, and which even stands in some intellectual clusters as the dominant image for the academic field of History.

The unfortunate reality is that streets outside the city center do not have the "power of memory" alluded to by Sebald.[234] My contribution is to create – through the slippage between text and image – a representation of Oxford that makes evident my emotional investment in the city, devising a context where the audience confronts their

[233] W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2002), 30-1.
[234] While other projects have tried to cover alternative aspects of Oxford's life, they tend to do so in a more programmatic historical or sociological manner. For an entertaining narrative that also challenges the stereotypes related to the city, see James Attlee, *Isolarion: A Different Oxford Journey* (London: Black Swan, 2009).

expectations, which is particularly well suited to the intimate experience of flipping through a book. At a minimum, I hope that the work resists forming an easy judgment on Oxford and its established narratives of tradition, power, and influence.



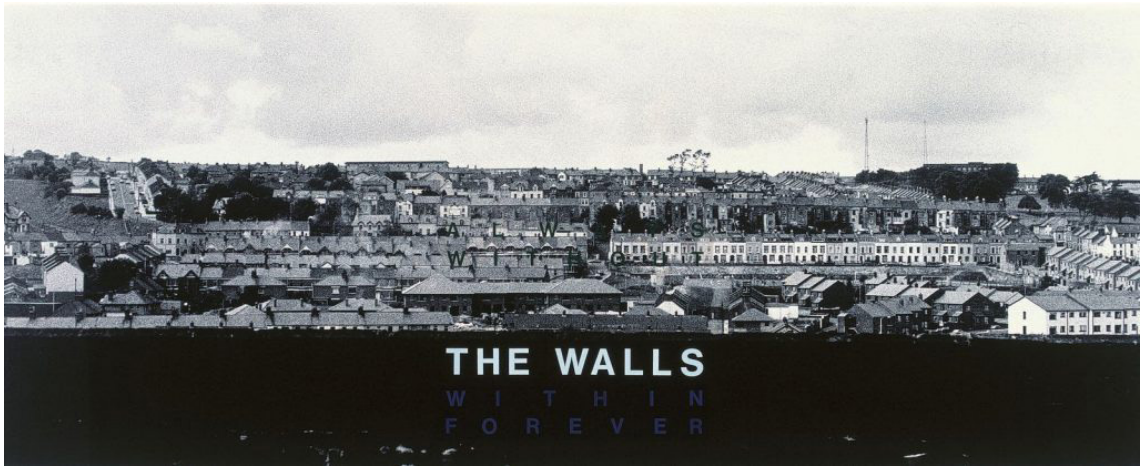
1.

Chris Verene
Cover of the book *Family* (2010)



2.

The Rock*A*Teens
Cover of the album *Sixth House* (2018)
Photograph by Chris Verene



3.

Willie Doherty
The Walls (1987)



4.

Joel Sternfeld
82-70 Austin Street, Kew Gardens, Queens, New York, 1995
From the series *On This Site*



5.

Alex Webb
Tehuantepec, Mexico, 1985
From the series *La Calle*



6.

Gabriele Basilico
Universum-Lichtspielhaus, Kurfürstendamm, 2000
From the series *Berlin*



7.

Gabriele Basilico
Krausenstrasse, 2000
From the series *Berlin*



8.

Installation view of Nicholas Nixon's exhibition *Self & City*
Fraenkel Gallery, 2009



9.

Nicholas Nixon
View East from Pi Alley, Boston, 2008



10.

David Goldblatt
Flushing Meadows and Lighting Masts, Site B, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 1987
From the series *The Structure of Things Then*



11.

Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 1990-94
From the series *Rokytník*



12.

Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 1995
From the series *bewohner*



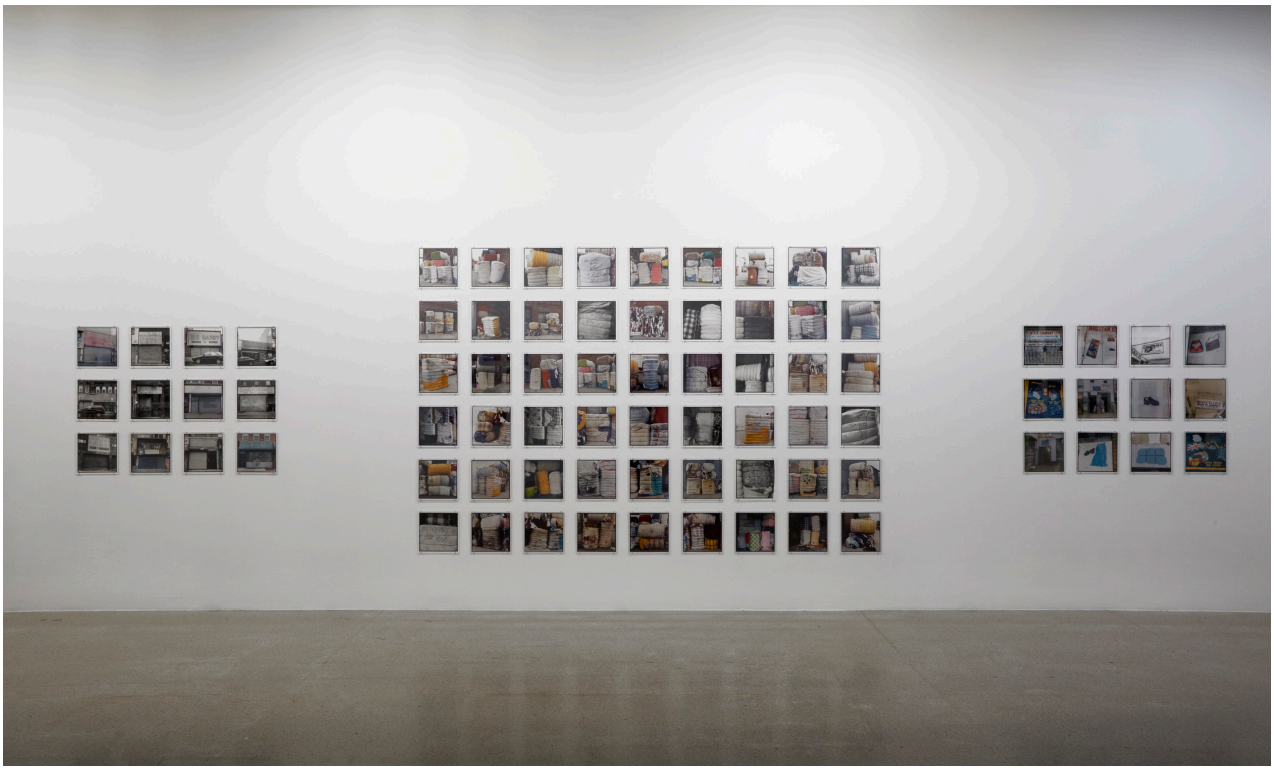
13.

Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled (Wand), 1998
From the series *Hier*



14.

Zoe Leonard
Ludlow Street, New York City, 1999
From the series *Analogue*



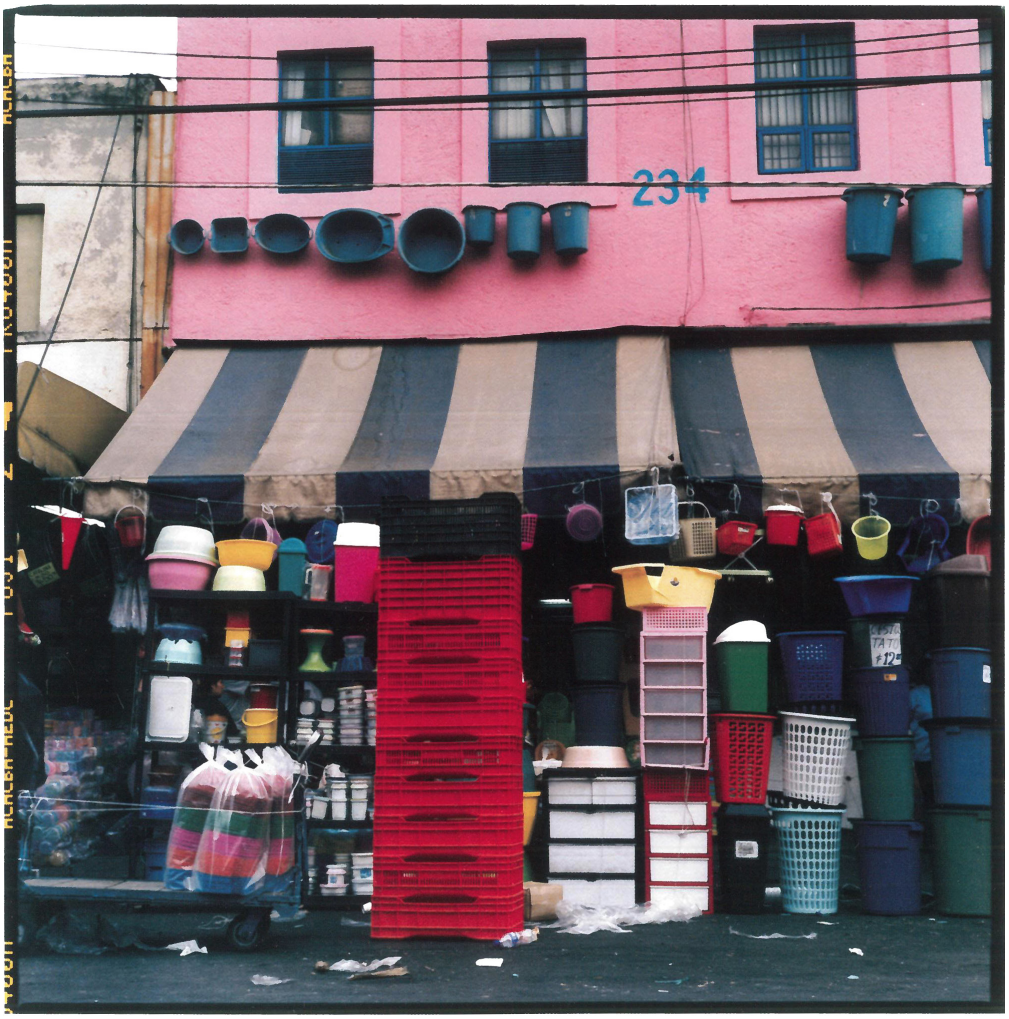
15.

Installation view of Zoe Leonard's exhibition *Photographs*
Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2010



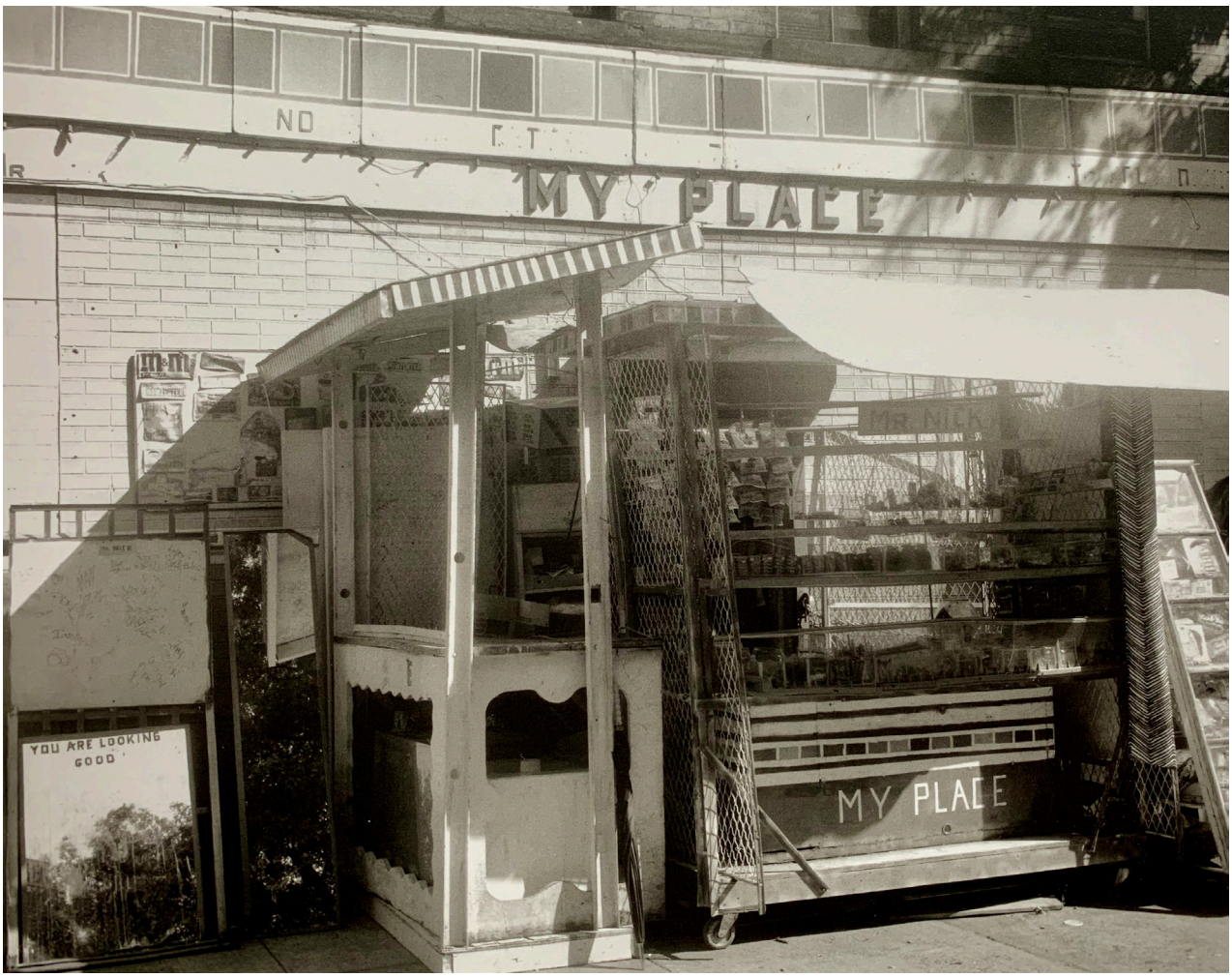
16.

Zoe Leonard
Mari, I'm Sorry (no. 2), 1995/97



17.

Zoe Leonard
La Merced Market, Mexico City, 2007
From the series *Analogue*



18.

Madoka Takagi
150th Street and Bradhurst Avenue, 1990
From the series *My Place*



19.

Madoka Takagi
126th Street between Saint Nicholas and Frederick Douglass Boulevard, 1990
From the series *My Place*



20.

Jérôme Sessini
Colonia Zaragoza, 2009
From the series *The Wrong Side*



21.

Jérôme Sessini
Ciudad Juárez, 2011
From the series *The Wrong Side*



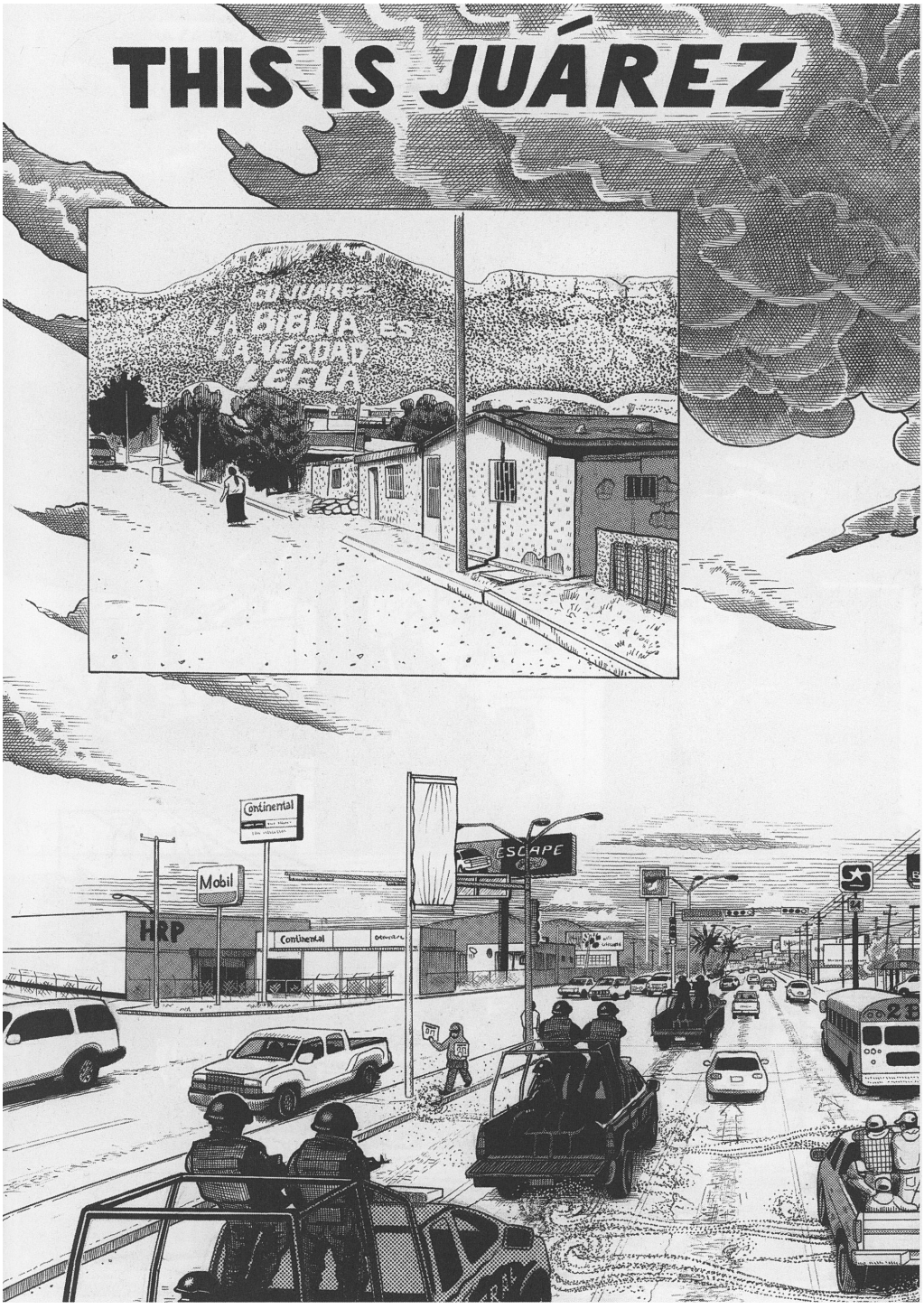
22.

El Diario de Juárez
Uncredited press photograph, 2017



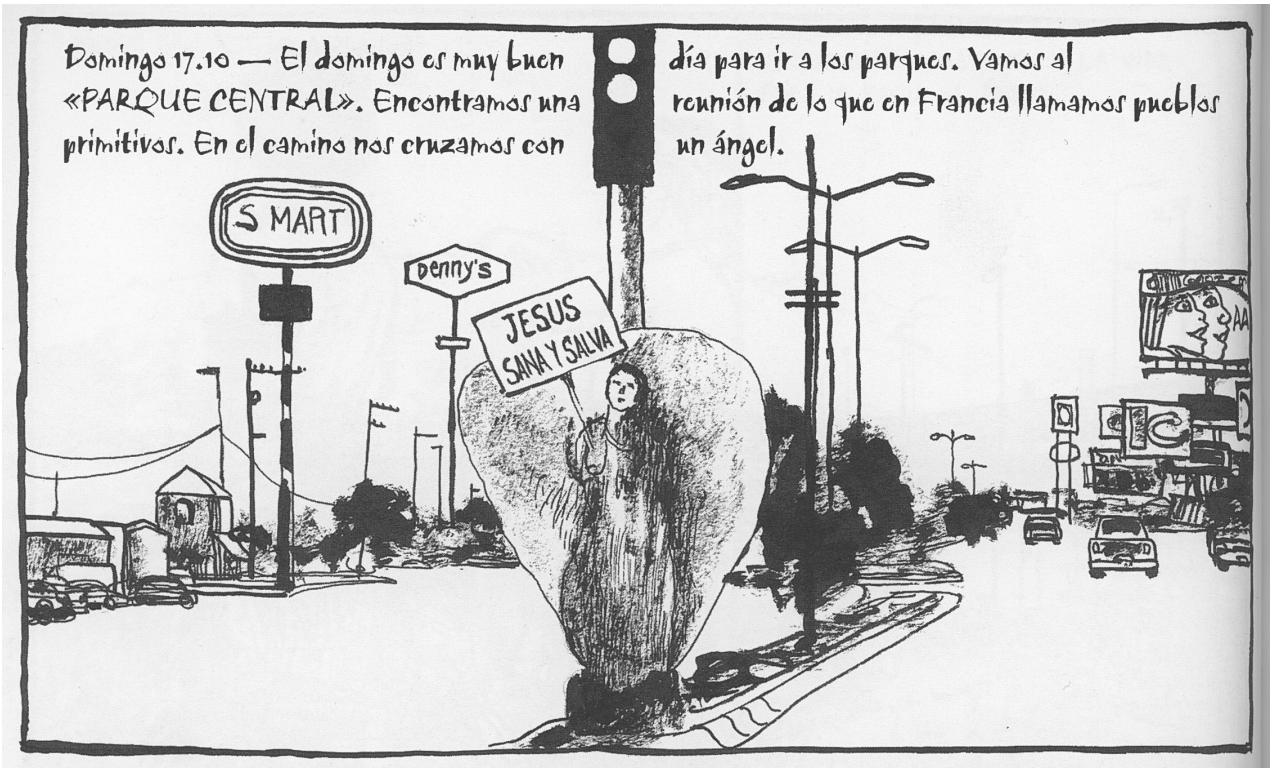
23.

Julián Cardona
Untitled, 2012
From the series *Stardust*



24.

Jon Sack
Vignette from the book *La Lucha*, 2015



25.

Edmond Baudoin and Jean-Marc Troubet
Vignette from the book *Viva la Vida*, 2011





26.

Denis Villeneuve
Stills from the film *Sicario*, 2015



27.

Martin Parr
The Bedels, Oxford, 2015
From the series *Oxford*

Original caption:
The Bedels officiate at University events,
and are drawn from both the University and the town.



28.

Mark Power
S10 North, London, 2004
From the series *26 Different Endings*



29.

John Gossage
Untitled, 2007
From the series *The Thirty-Two Inch Ruler*



30.

Moyra Davey
Glad, 1999

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